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XI.

PRETTY BABIOLE.

BY FORTUNÉ DU BOISGOBEY.



LONDON :

VIZETELLY & CO., 42 CATHERINE STREET, STRAND.

1886.

Perth:

S. COWAN AND CO., STRATHMORE PRINTING WORKS.

PRETTY BABIOLE.

I.

It is on an afternoon in winter, when daylight begins to wane, that you should see the Faubourg Montmartre, one of the most curious thoroughfares of Paris—of modern Paris, be it understood; for this faubourg, almost central now-a-days, when the grand boulevards form the heart of Paris, barely existed a century ago, and archæologists would waste their time if they searched it for one of the ancient dwellings abounding in the Marais.

The Faubourg Montmartre first rose up in the days when the dancing gardens of the Porcherons flourished—the dancing gardens dear to the Gardes Françaises and grisettes of the latter part of the last century—and it seems to have inherited the popularity of those gay places of revelry. It is mainly frequented by people who live from hand to mouth, who are ever on the move, who go to bed extremely late and eat when they can, for the shops of the provision dealers remain open until two o'clock in the morning.

Comparatively few people reside in the faubourg, but a great many pass along it. At night, it becomes noisy and crowded, just as the neighbouring streets grow silent and deserted, and after midnight it is the rendezvous of disreputable characters of both sexes. At the hour for lighting the street lamps, however, the faubourg is still only a crowded bustling thoroughfare, through which bankers' clerks and collectors eagerly hasten, without feeling the slightest anxiety for the safety of their bags of gold and their note-cases—a street thronged with cabs and drays; in short, a hard-working, honest faubourg.

Such was its aspect about five o'clock one afternoon, late last February, when two young men, who had been walking along side by side, were obliged by a block of vehicles to pause at the corner of the Rue Lafayette. They were both fairly well dressed, and of about the same height; but while one had broad shoulders, and was inclined to stoutness, the other was of slender refined build. The former, moreover, wore a heavy and rather unkempt beard, and the latter only a long, silky moustache. In short, the first was of commonplace appearance; while his companion was distinguished-looking and remarkably handsome. They seemed to be of about the same age. "My dear Louis," remarked the young fellow with the silky moustache, when they had finally succeeded in crossing the street, "I am afraid I sha'n't arrive in time. The office will be closed, and Monsieur Vernelle will refuse to see me. I have a great mind to defer my call until to-morrow."

"You are from the country, my dear André," replied his companion, "so it isn't strange that you should be ignorant of the customs that prevail

among financiers. From three o'clock to five, Monsieur Vernelle is engaged in receiving his brokers' clerks, in looking over the transactions of the day, and signing letters. By five o'clock his work is finished, and that is the most favourable time to approach him—especially when the funds have risen, as is the case to-day. You will find him in a good humour, and your letter of introduction will be favourably received, I feel sure."

"I hope so, indeed; for if I were obliged to return home, without any position or any prospect of one, I don't know what would become of my mother and me. My poor father left us barely anything to live upon. The collapse of the Union Générale reduced him to poverty, and he died of grief, as you know."

"The blow was the more severe as he had been very wealthy, and you had a right to expect a handsome fortune. As for me, my parents were always poor, and I knew that I should be obliged to look out for myself as soon as I left school."

"But now you are comfortable. You are the chief clerk in a prominent mercantile house in the Rue du Sentier, and in a fair way to become a member of the firm, while I still have my apprenticeship to serve, and am by no means sure that I am good for anything."

"Bah! with a fair amount of intelligence, a fellow can succeed in anything; besides, with a face like yours, a man has a chance of captivating his employer's daughter, and marrying her some day. There is no such flattering prospect for me, as I look more like a well-to-do mechanic than anything else; and yet, I don't complain of my fate. Monsieur Vernelle is a kind-hearted man. He won't refuse to give you a lift, and when you once get a place in his banking-house, the rest will depend solely upon yourself. By the way, he has a marriageable daughter."

"I am not so aspiring. I shall be quite content with a clerkship. Heaven grant that he gives me a position, and that I am capable of filling it."

"You do wrong to doubt your ability. Here in Paris a man needs plenty of assurance to prove successful. Say what you have to say boldly, and don't dwell too much on your poverty. But here we are at the Rue Bergère, where Vernelle lives. Do you see that iron gateway down there? That's his house. I will go with you as far as the door, and then wait for you at the café at the corner of the Rue Lafayette. We will dine together, and if you are successful we will celebrate the event with a modest feast—some oysters and a bottle of good wine."

"Nothing would please me better; but I am very much afraid that I sha'n't have a good report to make."

The conversation ceased. André was preparing for the interview which would decide his destiny, and Louis was silent, for fear of disturbing his friend's reflections. Friends, indeed, they were, of long standing, having studied at the same college, though they had lost sight of each other for several years. Louis Marbeuf and André Subligny had been chums at the Lycée Charlemagne; but they did not at that time seem destined to lead the same life, for Marbeuf's father was a hardware dealer who had strained every nerve to send his boy to college, while Subligny was the son of a wealthy ship-owner, who had retired from business with a handsome fortune. Marbeuf, an orphan at the age of eighteen, had begun life as a petty clerk; while Subligny had become one of the leaders of the gilded youth of his native town, dividing his time between Havre and Paris, and squandering the money with which his father kept him lavishly supplied. He had learned to tie a cravat to perfection, to lead a cotillon, and to ride,

but he had entirely forgotten how to work. His father's ruin had fallen like a thunderbolt upon him. The retired ship-owner, in order to pay his debts, sold his estates, his villa at Ingouville, and even his wife's jewels, and then went to live in a little village where he died. André there led a life of privation until his mother decided to send him to Paris with a letter to M. Vernelle, whom she reminded of a service rendered by her husband in former years, and asked for a situation for her son. André had arrived in Paris early that morning, and had slept until noon at his friend Marbeuf's rooms in the Rue Lamartine. Marbeuf had gone to fetch him there, as soon as his day's work was over, and they had set off together bound for M. Vernelle's offices.

Somewhat cheered by his friend's encouragement, André now crossed the courtyard, and after inquiring if the banker could be seen, was ushered into an imposing reception-room, where he handed his card to a footman in a quiet brown livery, on guard at the door of the private office. Several minutes elapsed, and when the footman reappeared to announce that M. Vernelle would see him, the young fellow turned pale with joy and emotion. Entering the private room, he found himself in the presence of a man who was writing at a desk, covered with papers, and who motioned him to be seated, without pausing in his work.

He obeyed, bowing respectfully, and waited, letter in hand, until his father's old friend found time to address him. M. Vernelle was still in the prime of life, though his hair was grey, and his face weary and care-worn. It makes one prematurely old to manage a large banking-house and conduct extensive financial operations. This banker had a cold and severe air, assumed, perhaps, to intimidate petitioners, and André, who had scarcely been honoured with a glance, began to feel very uncomfortable. His card was lying on the table, and he asked himself why M. Vernelle, who must have read the name, did not even condescend to look at him. In fact, the great financier continued to write steadily on, occasionally pausing to think of some word which did not promptly occur to his mind, but without lifting his eyes from the paper. The tick-tack of the pendulum marked the flight of the seconds in the midst of a glacial silence. André's heart sunk lower and lower, and he felt strongly tempted to turn and go off. Suddenly, however, a door opened at the other end of the room, and a gentleman entered carrying several packages of bank-notes. "Here are the eight hundred thousand francs to square Monsieur Bertaud's account," he said, in the monotonous voice of a well-trained cashier.

"All right. Lay the money down. Bertaud won't be here until six o'clock," replied M. Vernelle, without pausing in his writing.

The cashier placed the notes on the desk, within André's reach, and quietly withdrew. M. Vernelle appended his signature to the letter he had been writing, re-read it, folded it, enclosed it in an envelope, and addressed it, then glancing up at André, "What can I do for you, sir?" he coldly asked.

"I am the son of Mr. Charles Subligny, of Havre," stammered the young man.

"I know it. What do you desire of me?"

André presented his mother's letter. As he handed it to the banker, his fingers brushed against the bank-notes—a cruel contrast, for his present and prospective fortune consisted of barely two hundred francs. However, M. Vernelle took the proffered letter, opened it, and began to peruse it without a word. André tried to read on the banker's face what impression was produced by this petition, composed with such infinite care and pains

by his anxious mother. He had the pleasure of seeing that the further M. Vernelle progressed with his reading, the more his stern features relaxed, and when he reached the concluding lines, André, greatly surprised, fancied that his eyes were moist. "So your father met all his obligations?" said the banker.

"All, sir. He died penniless, but free from debt."

"He preferred honour to wealth. That is something unusual in these days."

"Could you doubt his acting thus—you, who knew him in years gone by?" asked André.

"Yes, I knew him, and I knew that he had paid his creditors; but I had heard none of the particulars of the affair. The terrible disaster of last year created a frightful panic in the business world, and I had no opportunity to bestow much attention on such of my acquaintances as were ruined. I was, consequently, not aware that your father and his family had been reduced to poverty through an excess of delicacy on his part—for it certainly was an excess of delicacy—no one would have blamed him for making some provision for his wife and child. I will add, that if he had applied to me, I should certainly have assisted him."

"He thought of doing so, sir, but dared not."

"He did very wrong. Years ago I found myself embarrassed. Had I been as timid as he was, I should probably have collapsed; but I explained my situation to some friends, and not one of them refused to assist me. Your father was one of the most generous of all, and it was chiefly due to him that I passed safely through the crisis, and re-established my business, which has prospered ever since. Your father then lent me a sum of money which he would have done well to have left in my business. But it is useless now to deplore what has passed. Tell me how you have lived since his death."

"My mother has an inalienable income of three thousand francs which was bequeathed to her by a distant relative. This is all we have had to live upon."

"Your mother, your father, and you?" exclaimed the banker with a gesture of astonishment.

"Yes, sir; we left Havre, and went to reside in the country. My poor father died there six months ago. He never rallied from the blow he had received."

"And your mother has bravely endured her unhappy lot! I thank her for writing and recommending you to me. She ought to have done so before. When did you arrive in Paris?"

"This morning, sir; and I should have called upon you immediately, had not a friend, who kindly invited me to share his rooms, told me that you only received persons who wished to see you on business matters prior to five o'clock."

"Your friend was quite right. How old are you?"

"I was twenty-five last month."

"You were educated here in Paris, I believe?"

"Yes, sir."

"And what have you been doing since you left school? what profession have you chosen?" André's heart failed him. M. Vernelle had placed his finger on the weak spot of his armour. "None, I suppose," continued the banker.

"I was anxious to enter the diplomatic service," replied the young man,

with evident embarrassment. "There seemed to be nothing to prevent me from doing so. My father was rich, so I could do what I liked, but afterwards time slipped by without my taking any decisive step."

"You no doubt had little taste for business?"

"I did not think of it at that time. My father retired several years before I left college, so I could not take his place, and—"

"Then you have done nothing whatever up to the present time?"

André now felt that there was, indeed, no hope for him, for all M. Vernelle's questions seemed intended to convince him of his unfitness to hold any position in a large banking-house. But the idea of parrying this thrust with a falsehood never once occurred to him. "What you say is true, sir," he replied, after a short pause. "I frankly admit that I have lived in absolute idleness. My father allowed me the greatest possible freedom. I abused it, and indulged freely in pleasure; but I now bitterly regret squandering money which would have greatly benefited my mother. However," added André, straightening himself up proudly, "I am positive that I have never committed a mean or dishonourable act. I have sinned through thoughtlessness and ignorance. I fancied that I should come into possession of a large fortune. This turned my head a little, but my heart is not spoiled."

"I believe you," replied M. Vernelle. "Good blood will show itself, and you belong to a family which has never been wanting in honour. I can readily excuse your faults, and I think all the better of you for not having concealed them from me. Hypocrisy is the worst of all vices, in my opinion. You have been a spoiled child. You must now make a man of yourself, and I am ready to help you in the effort."

"Oh, sir! you save me."

"Don't thank me. I am only repaying a debt of gratitude—an old obligation. Besides, I have taken a liking to you at first sight. I have no intention of employing you in my offices, however. You have had none of the training which is indispensable to a good clerk, nor would such a position suit you. I have a better one to offer you. Will you be my private secretary?"

"I!" exclaimed André.

"Yes, you," replied M. Vernelle. "I have long been looking for an intelligent, well-bred young man, whom I could initiate into my private affairs. Any clerks can attend to my business correspondence; but I need a man like yourself for my private correspondence. While working you will soon acquire the knowledge and experience you now lack. You will learn how to conduct gigantic financial operations, and I feel sure that you will make your way. I, myself, began in a much more humble position."

André, deeply touched, was about to burst forth into vehement protestations of gratitude, when a valet entered on tiptoe, and said a few words to M. Vernelle in a low tone. "Very well, I am coming," his master replied. André now rose to go, but the banker motioned him to reseal himself, remarking: "Remain, my young friend. I must explain to you more fully what your duties will be. My daughter wishes to see me, so I must leave you for a moment, but I should like you to wait for me."

André bowed and resumed his seat near the table, while M. Vernelle left the room.

He was overcome with joy, this brave André, and he certainly had cause to be. He had entered the great financier's office, nervous and trembling,

and now he was offered a situation he had not even dared to dream of. "My mother's life will be henceforth one of ease," he thought, "and it is to me she will owe it. When I think how she hesitated to apply to this kind-hearted man because she feared she might only expose me to useless humiliation! But he has a heart of gold, although apparently cold and haughty. He has treated me as if I were his son. It will not suffice to serve him faithfully. I should like to be rich some day, so as to prove my gratitude by doing for him what my father did some years ago. But this is a wish that never will be realized," added André. "Monsieur Vernelle is the possessor of millions, and I have absolutely nothing. He will retire from business before even I have made a quarter of the amount that is lying here on the table before me—eight hundred thousand francs!"

As he spoke, he glanced at the pile of bank-notes before him—glanced at it, not covetously, but with genuine curiosity. André had squandered a good deal of money, but he had never before seen so large an amount gathered together in so small a compass, for the notes were new ones, and had been subjected to the action of a press. "Eight hundred thousand francs!" he repeated, and, almost unconsciously, he picked up one of the eight packages to see what process had been employed to reduce a hundred thousand francs' worth of notes to the dimensions of a folded cambric handkerchief. On examination, he perceived that the package was formed of ten smaller packets of ten thousand francs each, carefully pinned, and then tied together with a silken cord. The package was still in his hand, and he was engaged in weighing it, when the door by which M. Vernelle had left the room suddenly reopened. There are decisive moments when a man's honour and life depend upon the quickness of a movement.

André could not replace the package on the pile from which he had just taken it without being seen by M. Vernelle; and what would the latter think of the young fellow's ill-timed curiosity in handling wealth which did not belong to him? André quite lost his head, and in his confusion and bewilderment, hastily concealed the notes in his trousers' pocket, which was hidden from view by the desk. The act was as involuntary as a recoil on the duelling ground, and he had not time to calculate its consequences. Immediately afterwards he rose up. He was very pale, and his limbs trembled under him, but M. Vernelle perceived nothing; besides, the young fellow's confusion might reasonably be imputed to the unexpected entrance of a young girl the banker brought with him. "My daughter Clémence insisted upon seeing you," said M. Vernelle, smiling, "and I can refuse her nothing. She is absolute mistress here; moreover, as you are destined to meet very frequently since you now belong to the establishment, I thought it would be well for you to make each other's acquaintance at once."

André bowed awkwardly. He scarcely dared to lift his eyes, and yet he had perceived that his employer's daughter was marvellously lovely. She was a blonde, with delicate features, and large blue eyes of wonderfully sweet expression; and, like André, she was tall and slender, without being thin. The pair might readily have been mistaken for brother and sister. "Oh! how strongly you resemble your father, sir!" exclaimed the girl, clapping her hands.

"What! mademoiselle, did you know him?" said André, greatly astonished.

"He always called to see us when he came to Paris, and when I was a child he used to give me any number of toys. Why did he never bring you to see us?"

André did not know what to reply. He managed, however, to stammer out some excuse, and to express regrets which were certainly sincere, for he thought Mademoiselle Vernelle charming, and said to himself that he would perhaps have quieted down sooner had he met her before.

"You have had the misfortune to lose him," she continued, "and without knowing you, I sympathised with you in your bereavement; I thank you for having thought of us."

André, surprised by this warm reception, looked timidly at M. Vernelle, who was smiling on his daughter. It was evident that he adored her, that she was his joy, his consolation, his hope. It was evident, too, that he would never thwart her inclinations, but unhesitatingly accept the man of her choice as his son-in-law. What a brilliant prospect for André, to whom she seemed to have taken a strong liking! However, the young fellow was in no condition to enjoy the unalloyed satisfaction which such unexpected good fortune ought to have caused him. He could only think of the senseless act which he had committed, and he was anxiously asking himself what he could do to avert its consequences. The accursed package of notes was in his pocket, and it seemed to him that it weighed a hundred pounds. To produce it, throw it on the table, and falling on his knees implore M. Vernelle's forgiveness for his momentary folly, would have been the heroic course, and, perhaps, he would have had courage to adopt it, had he been alone with the banker. But in Mademoiselle Vernelle's presence he would have died of shame. On the other hand, to take the money away with him would be stealing. This thought horrified him, but a fresh idea somewhat calmed his anxiety. "M. Vernelle brought his daughter here," he thought, "and he will probably accompany her to her own apartments when she leaves. If I am left alone again, if only for an instant, I can put the money back on the table. It will suffice for him to turn his back while he escorts her to the door."

"You do not answer me, now," continued Clémence in a musical voice that moved André to the depths of his inmost heart. "Speak, father, since Monsieur Subligny seems to be afraid of me. It is the first time in my life that I ever intimidated any one," she added laughing. "I did not know that I was so awe-inspiring."

M. Vernelle stepped up to André and took his hand—the very hand that had abstracted the hundred thousand francs, and said: "My dear lad, you see that every one here wishes you to be my secretary, so accept the position I offer you. It is not a very brilliant one, I admit, nor is it a sinecure, by any means. You will have plenty to do; though at first you will only write from my dictation; but by-and-bye, when you have become acquainted with my correspondents, and my business, I shall intrust my private correspondence entirely to you."

"The idea of declining your kind offer never occurred to me for an instant," replied André, with deep emotion; "and I regret that you require no more of me, for I would gladly make any sacrifice to serve you."

"That opportunity may be offered at some future day," said the banker, with a pleasant smile. "Now let us come to an understanding. Will you be ready to enter upon your duties to-morrow?"

"Quite ready," muttered André, shuddering as he thought, "I shall kill myself before to-morrow, if I don't find an opportunity of restoring the money I have taken."

"Then you will find me here at nine o'clock. I will introduce you to my cashier, and to my head book-keeper. They both know what a high

reputation for integrity your father left behind him, and you will find them kindly disposed towards you."

"How grateful—"

"Wait—I have not yet enumerated all your duties. I lunch at twelve o'clock, and you will lunch with me."

"And with me, if you please," said Mademoiselle Clémence, archly.

"Not every day, mademoiselle," said the father, with pretended sternness. "We shall often have to discuss business matters, Monsieur Subigny and I, and in that case you would be in the way."

"I confess that business matters possess very little interest for me."

"At five o'clock," continued the banker, addressing André, "you will be free, unless you feel inclined to devote your evening to us, in which case you will dine with us."

"And I always honour the dinner-table with my presence," exclaimed Clémence.

Had André's mind been in its normal condition, he would have thanked the banker in a few simple, but well chosen words; but he was half demented, for the moment of his departure was fast approaching, and the young lady, whose absence would have enabled him to rid himself of those terrible bank-notes, seemed determined to remain until the close of the interview. "There is still one point which we have not yet touched upon," resumed the banker; "the amount of salary you are to receive."

"I shall be perfectly satisfied with whatever you are willing to give me," said André, eagerly.

"No doubt; but I prefer to be explicit. I shall pay you five hundred francs a month to begin with. You must be in a position to render your mother some little assistance. You will write to her this evening, will you not?"

"It is too late for post, but I shall send her a telegram."

"Very good. You are staying with one of your friends, I think you told me."

"Yes; with Louis Marbeuf, an old schoolfellow."

"You must have some rooms for yourself, and have them suitably furnished. I will attend to the matter. But now good-bye until to-morrow, my dear André. I won't detain you any longer, for I am expecting one of my principal clients who is to come and fetch the money you see there." André's legs trembled under him. This was the final blow. The owner of the eight hundred thousand francs would come, count his money, and discover that one package of bank-notes was missing. André felt that he must leave at once in order to avoid the scene that would inevitably ensue; for he alone could have taken the money—and that he must go without restoring it, for the young lady showed no signs of leaving the room. He opened his lips to confess his fault, but an iron hand seemed to grasp his throat, and the words would not come. Mademoiselle Vernelle was looking at him, and her look paralysed his tongue: "*Au revoir*, Monsieur André," said the young girl, pleasantly, while her father gently pushed him towards the door, after cordially pressing his hand.

As André entered the waiting-room, it seemed to him as though the voice of conscience cried aloud: "You are a thief!" He staggered like a drunken man, so perceptibly, in fact, that the footman, who had risen to escort him to the outer door, inquired if he were ill. This footman was still another obstacle in the way of reparation, for André had thought of throwing the package on a chair or table where some member of the house-

hold would see it and return it to the banker. "I will drop it on the stairs," he said to himself, as he left the waiting-room.

But this plan likewise proved futile, for he was not halfway downstairs when he heard some footsteps behind him. The cashier was leaving for the day, and out of politeness, probably, he abstained from passing the visitor whom he had seen, a short time before, in his employer's private room. André consequently had to leave the house with the fatal package still in his pocket, and with that same terrible voice repeating in his ears: "A man has offered you a helping hand in your adversity, and you have robbed him—for it is robbery merely to touch money that does not belong to you. And now, whether you live or whether you die, his daughter, who welcomed you as a brother, will know that you are a scoundrel; for even if you have courage to kill yourself, your body will be taken to the Morgue, and the bank-notes you have abstracted will be found upon your person. Monsieur Vernelle will recognise them as his property, without a doubt, for they are all new notes, fresh from the bank; and you will cause your mother's death, for she will die of grief and mortification on learning that you were a thief."

As André reached the gateway he paused, and the cashier stepped past him, bowing as he did so. André, relieved of this dangerous witness, would, probably, have retraced his steps, had not a gentleman, to whom the cashier also bowed, just then entered the courtyard; and this gentleman was, in all probability, the capitalist who had come to fetch the large sum lying upon M. Vernelle's desk. This crushed the unfortunate youth's last hope, and he darted like a madman along the Rue Bergère. He felt inclined to throw himself into the Seine. "And yet," he thought, "it would be better for me to return the notes in a letter, in which I will confess everything to Monsieur Vernelle, and tell him that he will never see me again. But to whom shall I intrust the letter? I cannot confide it to a common messenger, for it might never reach its destination. No, nothing is left for me but to die. But I am determined not to be carried to the Morgue. I will kill myself at home."

He had scarcely made this desperate resolve when he recollected that Marbeuf was waiting for him at a café near-by. Had he any right to put an end to his life without seeing his friend again, without pressing his hand for the last time, and without begging him to defend his memory, and to explain, to all those who knew him, that he had killed himself to expiate a crime unwittingly committed? No, it was his duty to confess everything to his friend, and to commend his mother to his care.

His mother? Far away in the little hamlet where she had sought a refuge, she was anxiously waiting for the letter which André had promised to write to her as soon as his interview with M. Vernelle was over. She was counting the hours. And instead of good news, she would receive her son's last farewell. It would be enough, and more than enough to kill her.

"No," murmured André, as he made his way through the crowd in the Faubourg Montmartre, "no, I must beg Louis to go to Harve. His employers won't refuse him two days' leave. He can see her and try to console her; for though he is a little rough in manner, he has an excellent heart."

These reflections, and others of a similar nature, engrossed André's mind until he reached the corner of the Rue Drouet, whence he saw Marbeuf seated at a small table in front of the café chosen as their place of meeting. Just then a gentleman passed by, and André fancied he recognized the

cashier whom he had already seen on the staircase, as he was leaving Monsieur Vernelle's room. It mattered little, however, to André whether it was he or not; he felt no curiosity in regard to him. Crossing the street, he sank upon a chair beside Marbeuf, who eagerly inquired: "Well, did you succeed?" Receiving no response, Louis gloomily resumed: "I see by your face that the banker snubbed you. I expected it. Rich men have no feeling. I don't believe this one even granted you a hearing."

"You are very much mistaken," replied André, bitterly. "I had only to send in my card to obtain an interview."

"And after reading your mother's letter, he assumed a heart-broken air, and assured you, wrapping the bitter pill in plenty of honeyed words, that he could do nothing whatever for you. That is always the way."

"You do Monsieur Vernelle great injustice. The letter seemed to touch him deeply. There were tears in his eyes as he read it."

"Then his tears probably lie very near the surface. It would have been more to the purpose had he offered you a place in his establishment."

"He offered me something better."

"What? pecuniary aid, or a recommendation to a fellow-banker?"

"Neither. He asked me to act as his private secretary. I can enter upon my duties at nine o'clock to-morrow morning if I like."

"And the salary?"

"I am to have five hundred francs a month, to begin with."

"Zounds! you are in luck! I have been working seven years, and I don't get as much as that yet. And did Vernelle promise you advancement, besides?"

"He gave me to understand that he would take care of my future, and that from this day forth I should be treated as one of his family. I am to lunch with him every day."

"And still you are not satisfied! You certainly must be hard to please."

"His daughter, too, came in while I was there, and he introduced me to her."

"That caps the climax! See if you don't marry her some day. She is charming, isn't she?"

"Adorable! And she spoke very affectionately of my father, whom she seems to have seen very often in former years."

"This is surely a most promising beginning. Mark my words: in less than two years' time you will be Monsieur Vernelle's son-in-law and partner. But how is it that you come here with a most lugubrious countenance, when in point of fact your fortune is made? What is the meaning of this farce? I think it in very bad taste. I am your friend. I thought I had convinced you of that, and yet you treat me like a stranger."

"You will forgive my dejection when you learn the cause of it."

"Indeed! What is the matter with you?"

"My only course is to put a bullet through my brain or drown myself. When I left Monsieur Vernelle's I was strongly tempted to go straight to the river instead of coming here."

"You want to kill yourself! Has your good fortune turned your brain?"

"No. I haven't lost my mind, and it is for that very reason that I am resolved to put an end to my life. You think me very lucky, and you are rejoicing over my good fortune. Ah, well! I return to you dishonoured. I am a thief."

"A thief! What do you mean by that joke?"

"I am a thief, I tell you! While I was in the banker's private office, the cashier came in and laid a large package of bank-notes on the table. A moment afterwards Monsieur Vernelle went out, leaving me alone in the room."

"And you yielded to the temptation?"

"No. The devil impelled me probably, for I picked up one of the packages of notes to see how much a fortune would weigh. Monsieur Vernelle returned almost instantly, and I hadn't time to put the money back where I found it; in fact, in my bewilderment, I involuntarily slipped the package into my trousers' pocket."

"Did Vernelle see you do it?"

"No; he had no suspicion, for he redoubled his kind attentions and promises of assistance."

"But why didn't you tell him the truth and return the money?"

"His daughter was present; he had brought her with him, and I couldn't summon up courage. I couldn't bear the thought of being compelled to blush before her."

"But it will be far worse to be arrested. Vernelle will count his money, and as you were the only person in the office—"

"He will enter a complaint against me, and I shall go where thieves go. You see there is nothing left for me but to die."

The expression of Marbeuf's face had undergone a decided change. Its severity was truly ominous. "Even death won't save you from dishonour," he said, after a painful silence. "Some other plan must be devised."

"I have tried to think of one, but in vain," replied André, sadly. "I am lost, I realize it, and I am resigned to my fate. I would rather die than go to prison, but I should first like to restore the money I have stolen."

"I should hope so, indeed," replied Marbeuf, almost sulkily. "What is the amount?"

"I do not know exactly. I have not dared to touch it since I put it in my pocket. It is a package made up of several smaller packets secured by pins, and tied together with a bit of silk."

"Then the amount is one hundred thousand francs," said Marbeuf, who sometimes went to the bank to draw money for his employer. "And it was the cashier who brought this money into the room, you say?"

"Yes, there was eight hundred thousand francs in all, and a gentleman was to call for them at six o'clock—a Monsieur Bertaud—"

"Bertaud, I know him. He is very rich, but he isn't a man to take money without counting it, and he will be pitiless. He once dismissed a subordinate for making a mistake of six hundred francs in the settlement of an account."

"And by this time he must have discovered that there were one hundred thousand francs deficient, for I think I met him at the gateway, as I was coming out."

"The deuce! then there is no time to lose. Still, I am sure that Vernelle won't act hastily. He will question his cashier, and the clerk who went to the Bank of France for the notes—for they must have come from the bank—Vernelle wouldn't be likely to keep so much money in his safe. Now neither the cashier nor the clerk is at hand, for the office is closed, and all the employés have gone home."

"Yes, the cashier left just as I did,"

"And he won't return this evening, so we have until to-morrow."

"Then you hope to extricate me from this frightful position?"

Marbeuf gazed searchingly at his unfortunate friend, who hung his head like a criminal in the presence of his judge. "Listen, André," said the young clerk at last. "I swear to you that if I thought you guilty, even in thought, I would abandon you to your fate, and never speak to you again. Integrity is my only wealth, for I have no protector, and have nothing to hope for except from my industry and good conduct." André was greatly affected by this reproof which he had richly deserved, but he made no protest. "I feel sure, however, that you have told me the truth," continued Marbeuf; "for if you were dishonest, you wouldn't have confessed your fault. It is grave, very grave, and it may have consequences that you haven't foreseen. Innocent parties may be accused of the theft—"

"I know it, and I would rather denounce myself than be the cause of such a calamity."

"Denounce yourself! That is what you had better do, perhaps. I must admit, however, that it would cost you the esteem of Monsieur Vernelle and his daughter, for you would lose it—no business man would ever believe that you had taken this money unintentionally. Other people's money is sacred, and ought not to be touched under any pretext whatsoever." André remained silent, and tears coursed down his cheeks.

"I will not demand such a cruel sacrifice of you, however," resumed Marbeuf, "and I don't despair of saving you. I have a plan, but I am not yet sure whether it is feasible, for there are a few questions I should like to ask you. But let us have some dinner."

"Dinner, you can think of dinner!"

"Yes, certainly. I have no fortune in my pocket to worry me, and I feel hungry. If you don't care to eat, you can at least sit at table and tell me what I wish to know while I am taking in sustenance."

Marbeuf had already called the waiter and paid for the appetizer he had partaken of while waiting for his friend. He now rose, and led André towards the corner of the Rue Lafayette and the Faubourg Montmartre where there was one of the cheap restaurants known in Paris as "Etablissements de Bouillon." They went upstairs, and sat down at a white marble table, where Marbeuf's order was promptly taken by a neat waitress with a white apron. Most of the surrounding tables were already occupied; and as new-comers, in accordance with the prevailing custom, might soon install themselves at theirs, Marbeuf decided to profit of the few moments of comparative isolation that remained. "You wish to restore the money, do you not?" said he, "and restore it without letting Monsieur Vernelle know that it is you who have made restitution?"

"Yes, certainly; but how can that be managed? To whom can I intrust this money which I myself cannot return under penalty of discovery? I might send it by post—"

"That would be the worst of methods. You could not register the letter without giving your name and address; and if you only throw the package into an ordinary letter-box it may never reach its destination. No, I have something better to suggest. At what time does this banker dine?"

"How can you expect me to know?" replied André.

"That's true; he hasn't yet invited you to dinner. However, he must dine at about seven o'clock, so I should be almost sure to find him at home when I leave here."

"What! you are willing to—"

"Yes, I have a plan which may prove practicable. I will go to Vernelle, and tell him that in the courtyard of his house I have found a package of bank-notes which is probably his property, and which I therefore return to him. I shall take care to mention the place where I picked the money up. It will be at the foot of the staircase used by the clerks. I am familiar with the interior of the establishment, having been sent there several times by my employer. My story will sound very plausible, and Vernelle won't doubt it for an instant. He will think that the messenger dropped one of the packages, and that his cashier failed to notice the loss on receiving the money."

"But he will ask your name?"

"That is more than probable, but I sha'n't be foolish enough to tell it, or to accept the reward he will certainly offer me. If I disclose my name, he will ultimately find out that I am a friend of yours, and in that case suspect that I have acted on your behalf. I shall positively refuse to tell him who I am, and if he insists, why, I shall give him some fictitious name. But he will believe me, for I assure you that I shall play my part to perfection. If you will play yours equally well, there will be no trouble."

"My part! I don't understand you," said André.

"Vernelle mustn't suspect you, so you must go to his place to-morrow at the appointed hour."

"I am by no means sure that I shall have the courage to do so."

"But you must. If you fail to keep your appointment, Vernelle will speedily understand that my pretended finding of the money was only invented to conceal your guilt, for at this very moment he is probably saying to himself that you must be the person who took the money."

"I know that, and the mere thought of it fills me with shame."

"You must exercise more self-control. Your employer will receive you cordially, as the money will have been restored before you present yourself; but it is more than likely that he will tell you of the singular circumstance. If he speaks of the notes, try to repress all signs of emotion. All my trouble will be lost if you don't keep your wits about you."

"I will do my best, but I cannot vouch for success," muttered André.

"In any case I must see you again before I risk a visit to Vernelle's office, for if you fail, or if any unforeseen circumstance occurs—"

"You will be informed of the result this evening. Go straight to my rooms when we leave here, and I will join you there in an hour—or perhaps two hours' time. That depends upon whether I find Vernelle at home. In any case I sha'n't return until after I have restored him this money. You have only to wait for me."

"In an agony of suspense, as you may imagine."

"Yes, but if I succeed, as I am sure I shall, you will get off very easily. Come, here is the key of my apartments. Hand me the notes, while we are still alone at the table, and while no one is looking at us."

André asked nothing better than to be relieved of a burden that weighed much more heavily on his conscience than on his person. He took the key, and handed the package to Marbeuf, who hastily put it out of sight. But suddenly André turned pale, and whispered: "I am lost! Monsieur Vernelle's cashier is here. He has seen us, and he may have overheard us."

"Are you sure that you are not mistaken?"

"Perfectly sure. He entered Monsieur Vernelle's office while I was there, and I met him again on the stairs as I was leaving the house. He

must have taken the same route that I did, for he passed me again at the corner of the Faubourg Montmartre."

"What if he has been following you?"

"I think not. Besides, he can know nothing about the affair, as he left Monsieur Vernelle's house at the same time as I did. You can see him without turning round—look—that heavily-bearded man dining alone at the table on the opposite side of the room."

"Yes, I can see him. He has a prosperous air, and I am surprised to see him at a restaurant of this class. He must have a good salary, and yet he contents himself with a bit of boiled beef, some Gruyère cheese, and two penn'orth of wine. He must be of an economical disposition."

André listened, without saying a word, fearing that he might attract the attention of this dangerous neighbour. However, the person referred to did not seem to notice the two friends. He was at least forty years of age, and very dark. He wore a neatly-fitting black frock-coat, an irreproachable necktie, and a tasteful pair of fancy trousers. "He seems to be more of a fop than an epicure," remarked Marbeuf, who was still watching him furtively; "and he isn't generous, for he has given nothing to the waitress. He is going now. Well, I can't say that I regret him."

"But he saw me hand you the bank-notes."

"Nonsense! you only imagine that. In fact, I doubt very much if he has even recognised you. Besides, he is too far off to be able to see whether you gave me a package of notes or an old newspaper. Thousand-franc notes, or, indeed, bank-notes of any description are not very common here. So don't be uneasy. My plan will prove successful, never fear." And beckoning to the waitress, Marbeuf gave her a gratuity, and rose to go.

He had eaten but little, and André had scarcely touched any of the dishes his companion had ordered. They went downstairs. Marbeuf settled the score at the counter, and on reaching the pavement, turned to André, saying: "It is now half-past eight, and I have a good chance of finding Vernelle still at home. I must leave you now, so good-bye. I hope to see you again within an hour's time."

André turned away with a bursting heart and wildly throbbing brain. Marbeuf, on his side, was by no means as sure of the success of his scheme as he pretended. Moreover, in spite of his determination to maintain his incognito, the banker might have him followed after the interview, learn who he was, and inform his employers of the rather suspicious part he had played in this affair. But this consideration was not of a nature to deter him. He was particularly anxious to extricate his friend from peril. So he hurried on towards the Rue Bergère. As it was very near the restaurant, it took him but ten minutes to reach the house where Subligny had so foolishly imperilled his future. The gate of the courtyard was closed. Marbeuf at once rang at a side-door, which was reserved for M. Vernelle's private use. The ring was answered by a footman, who declared that his master did not receive that evening, but on Marbeuf insisting and swearing that he came on a matter of great importance, the lackey vouchsafed the information that M. Vernelle had gone with mademoiselle to see a new play at the Renaissance Theatre. The banker's absence deranged all Marbeuf's carefully-laid plans. How could he gain an entrance to M. Vernelle's box? and how could he restore the money in the daughter's presence? The situation was so embarrassing that Marbeuf wondered for a moment if it would not be safer and easier to state the case to the servant, and intrust the money to him. This man was not acquainted with him, so that M.

Vernelle would never know who had made this restitution. Still, the banker might suppose that it had been made by André; and, moreover, footmen are not above temptation, and this one might appropriate the money. After a little reflection, Marbeuf decided to keep the money in his pocket and try his luck at the Renaissance.

He hastened on towards the theatre, choosing the shortest route, which was along the Rue de l'Echiquier, a street which, although greatly crowded in the daytime, becomes almost deserted at night, all the shops being closed at eight o'clock. Marbeuf walked on rapidly without looking behind; but it suddenly occurred to him that, in order to make his story seem the more plausible, the bank-notes ought to be a little soiled, and as there is plenty of dirt in the Rue de l'Echiquier, he stooped down to rub them gently on the ground. When he raised his head again, he was surprised to see, but a few steps off, a man in a blouse and a soft felt hat, the latter pulled down over his eyes. The idea that this man was watching his movements occurred to him, still he walked quietly on. After proceeding a little further, he glanced back and saw that the man was certainly following him, and even quickening his pace to overtake him. However, he was not alarmed. What had he to fear at nine o'clock in the evening, in a central part of Paris? Besides, this person certainly could not know that he had a hundred thousand francs in his pocket. So he walked on briskly until he abruptly encountered an obstacle. Across the sidewalk there was one of those deep trenches which have occasioned so many accidents in Paris. Marbeuf did not perceive it until it was under his nose, and then he, of course, hastily stepped back, but at this moment the man in the blouse, who had begun to run, jostled Marbeuf in passing with such violence that André's messenger fell head foremost into the trench, where he lay as if stunned or dead. It was decreed that the hundred thousand francs should not be replaced in M. Vernelle's safe that night.

II.

WHILE Marbeuf met with this adventure in trying to save his friend from dishonour, André slowly returned to Louis' rooms. He was in no haste, for he foresaw that he would have to wait a long time for his friend's return, nor was he at all sanguine as to the success of the venture. All his gloomy forebodings had returned with increased force, and he felt inclined to linger in the street and try to divert his thoughts, if possible, with the noise and confusion around him. Accordingly, he chose the longest route to reach Marbeuf's abode, which was situated at the end of the Rue Lamartine, near the church of Notre Dame de Lorette. André proceeded slowly up the Rue Lafayette with his head bowed upon his breast, and his mind oppressed by the remembrance of his fault. He had just reached the corner of the Rue Montholon, when a young woman brushed past him, closely followed by a man who seemed to be trying to talk to her, but whom she apparently refused to listen to, for she was quickening her pace as if to avoid him. It was one of those incidents of the Paris streets which usually attract but little attention, as, nine times out of ten, the victim is not worthy of protection. The person who had just passed André was very young. She carried a large bandbox in her hand, and she was very plainly dressed. She turned into the Rue Montholon, which happened to be deserted for the moment, and the man, probably emboldened by this circum-

stance, tried to slip his arm round her waist. Though violently repulsed, he was about to return to the charge, when André at last decided to interfere. Overtaking the pair with a few hurried strides, he pushed the man on one side, and offered his arm to the girl, who accepted it without a word. The man was apparently afraid to engage in a quarrel, for he slunk away with a muttered oath. André had barely caught a glimpse of his face, and yet it seemed to him that this was not the first time he had seen him. However, he determined to extricate himself at once from this rather embarrassing position. He had undertaken the defence of a *grisette*, but he wished the matter to end there, and he was about to withdraw his arm when she said to him: "I thank you, monsieur, for having come to my assistance. Pray do not leave me yet. I live only a short distance off. Won't you have the kindness to accompany me to my door?" The girl's invitation seemed rather bold, but her voice was so sweet, and her manner so frank, that any doubt of her intentions was impossible.

"Certainly, mademoiselle," replied André, courteously. "You must have been very frightened?"

"Oh, I am accustomed to these disagreeable adventures. Men imagine I will listen to them, but I generally know how to get rid of them. However, I must confess that I was rather afraid this time; that man was such a coarse creature."

"He won't trouble you while I am with you."

"No, men of his class are invariably cowards. I am very glad that you freed me from his clutches."

"But why do you go out alone in the evening?"

"Because there is no one to accompany me home from the shop. My parents are dead, and my only living relative is an uncle, who is busy all day, and who hasn't time to escort me home, for he is often obliged to work till ten o'clock at night. I only see him on Sundays."

"And you have no lover?"

"I haven't time for one," replied the girl, laughing. "Besides I don't want any."

André thought it best to drop a conversation which threatened to become too personal, and the girl did not attempt to renew it. They had passed the Rue Rochechouart, and were walking up the Rue Lamartine, when she abruptly let go of his arm, and exclaimed: "Here I am at my own door, sir. Let me thank you once more, and bid you good-night."

"What! do you live here?" exclaimed André, recognising the door of the house in which his friend Marbeuf resided.

"Yes, sir; on the fourth floor."

"So do I."

"Impossible! I've never seen you before."

"I only arrived in Paris this morning, and am stopping for the present with a friend."

"With Monsieur Marbeuf, then? Oh, I know him very well, at least, by sight—his windows overlook the courtyard, like mine. We live directly opposite each other, and our doors open on the same landing. But we don't visit each other. Your friend seems rather reserved." André made no reply. He took the remark for an invitation, and did not wish to commit himself. "However, I am seldom or never at home," continued the girl, who had perhaps read his thoughts. "Now will you kindly allow me go in first? Our doorkeeper is a great gossip, and if she sees me coming in with you, she will talk about it for a month."

"You are right, mademoiselle," replied André, stepping aside to let her pass.

The door was open, and the girl, a little surprised by his coldness, bowed to him slightly, and disappeared up the passage. A few moments later André entered in his turn. His former doubts and fears again assailed him; and he had already ceased to think of the girl who had momentarily made him forget that his fate was being decided.

Marbeuf's apartments consisted of four very modestly furnished rooms. The one André occupied contained a camp bedstead, a few cane-seated chairs, a chest of drawers, and a writing-table. Upon the wall hung a few photographs, a cuckoo clock, a revolver, and two or three old engravings. André, before lighting a candle, noticed, through the uncurtained window, another lighted window on the other side of the narrow courtyard—in all probability it was that of the girl whom he had just met. He did not stop to look at it, however; but seated himself at the table to await his friend's return. He had left the key in the door so that Marbeuf might enter without ringing, for he felt overcome with fatigue, and feared that he might drop asleep in spite of the anxiety that tormented him. Indeed, after a short struggle his eyes closed, and his head sunk upon his right arm which was resting on the table.

When he awoke he was still alone, and his first thought was to ascertain the time. Rising to look at the cuckoo clock that hung on the wall, he found that it was a quarter to twelve o'clock, and that Marbeuf had not yet returned. "I am lost!" he exclaimed. "Louis hasn't succeeded in deceiving Monsieur Vernelle, and he does not like to bring me news of his failure. If he hadn't found the banker at home he would have returned to reassure me. What can have happened to him?"

A most unworthy suspicion now flashed through his mind. Could Marbeuf have merely offered him his services in order to obtain possession of the hundred thousand francs? However he harboured the thought only for an instant. He knew that Marbeuf's honesty was above suspicion. Could anyone have murdered him, in order to obtain possession of the money? That was by no means impossible in these days of daring robberies.

"However it may be, the only thing left for me is to die," said André, gloomily, and he involuntarily turned to the revolver hanging on the wall. He took it down, examined it, and found that it was loaded.

"That is fortunate," he murmured. "When the clock strikes twelve I will blow my brains out."

He was mad, for he did not even think of writing to his mother. Revolver in hand, he stood watching the hands as they moved on, and counted the moments that were left for him to live. The ticking of the pendulum resounded loudly in his ears, and at last he heard the creaking sound that announced the striking of the clock; then raising the pistol to his forehead, he was about to pull the trigger, when he heard the door open. "It is he! it is Marbeuf!" he exclaimed, lowering his weapon.

But it was not Marbeuf, and André uttered a cry of surprise. The girl he had protected stood before him, pale, agitated, and evidently very much embarrassed at her intrusion into a neighbour's apartments at such an unreasonable hour. Nor was her reception calculated to reassure her. "What do you want?" André inquired, angrily, advancing to bar her passage. But she entered in spite of him. "Will you answer me?" he roughly added. "I warn you that you are wasting your time here."

"Oh, don't misjudge me, sir," she said, imploringly, with tears in her eyes.

"Speak, then, and tell me what you want," replied André, slightly appeased by her entreating manner. She still hesitated, but at last, in a voice that trembled with emotion, she asked: "Why do you wish to die?"

"You are mad," replied André.

"No, for from my window I saw you rise, approach the clock, see what time it was, take the revolver—"

"How dare you play the spy on me?"

"No, no. I assure you that it was only by chance that I happened to see you. There are no curtains to your window."

"Why were you not in bed? It is now more than three hours since you returned home."

"I had a bonnet to trim. We are very busy at the shop just now. I had only just finished my work and was going to bed when I noticed that there was a light in your room."

"And because you saw me with a revolver in my hand, you fancied I was going to kill myself. You have a very vivid imagination, *mademoiselle*."

"I hope I was mistaken, I am sure; but why are you so pale? Pray, tell me the truth. Some misfortune has befallen you."

"What right have you to meddle with my affairs?" asked André, impatiently.

"Didn't you meddle with mine?" replied the girl, gently. "You didn't know me, and yet you protected me from a man who insulted me. You are no longer a stranger in my eyes."

Struck by these words, André threw the pistol on the table, saying to himself: "I shall have plenty of time between now and to-morrow to blow my brains out, and if Marbeuf returns, this girl will have saved my life."

"You were mistaken in regard to the object of my visit," the girl continued. "If you knew who I am—"

"The fact is I know nothing at all about you," replied André, somewhat ironically.

"Allow me to tell you, then; but permit me first to take a seat. My emotion has overpowered me." She took a chair while André remained standing, with his arms crossed over his chest. "In the first place, I am only sixteen," she began, almost gaily. "It would certainly be very unfortunate if I behaved improperly at my age, and I assure you that I have no desire to do so. I was brought up much better than many of my employer's customers. My parents were in business, and had they lived, I should not now be working in a milliner's shop."

"Ah!" thought André, "I am about to listen once more to the pleasing fiction which all *grisettes* relate to gentlemen to prevent them from believing that they were born in hovels."

"But unfortunately my father was ruined by a man who betrayed his confidence," continued the girl, "and if I told you how he died—you would understand the horror I felt when I saw you with that revolver in your hand."

"What, did he kill himself?"

"Yes, in a paroxysm of despair, forgetting that he might retrieve his losses by patient industry, and that he would leave his wife in poverty. My poor mother died, after struggling along six months—"

The girl paused. Sobs choked her utterance. "Calm yourself, made-

moiselle," said André, touched by her grief, and struck by the analogy between her fate and his own.

"Forgive me, sir," she said, dashing away her tears. "I ought not to give way to my grief before you, for you must have sorrow enough to bear—I ought, on the contrary, to try and make you forget your troubles—but whenever I think of my mother my feelings overpower me."

"Tell me about yourself."

"So be it. I was still at school when I lost my father. My mother was, of course, obliged to take me away, and she apprenticed me to a milliner. On her death I was left alone in the world—no, I had an uncle, as I have already told you, my mother's brother; but he was poor, merely having his salary to live upon, so he could do nothing for me. I, also, was obliged to earn my own living, and I have done that ever since by working as a milliner. I do very well, and if I were not so young, I should be forewoman at Madame Divet's, who employs me at her shop on the Boulevard Magenta. I was returning from there when you met me this evening."

"It must be very unpleasant to have to return home alone every evening, and to incur the risk of being annoyed by fellows like the one who insulted you to-night," said André, interested in spite of himself by this simple tale.

"Oh, yes. The first time I was so frightened that I ran every step of the way; but I gradually became accustomed to it. Now, when any man attempts to enter into conversation with me, I send him about his business pretty tartly, I can tell you, and he seldom tries it a second time."

"But you must be exposed to many temptations, I'm afraid."

"Temptations! why, I have everything I want. My poor mother left me a little furniture, and as I receive very good wages, I have no difficulty about paying my rent. My quarters are not as spacious as those of Monsieur Marbeuf, but if you ever see them you will admit that they are very cozy, and even pretty. I see only a tiny bit of sky, it is true, but I have my flowers and birds all the same."

"That is something, of course, still—"

"Oh, I have many other diversions. Pleasant Sundays, for instance, when Madame Divet takes me with her to the Champs Élysées; besides, she occasionally takes me to the theatre. One of her oldest customers is an actress who often gives her tickets. I am very fond of the theatre. When a play pleases me, I buy it, and amuse myself by learning it by heart."

"And you feel no desire to go on the stage?"

"Oh, no! I am very happy as I am."

André positively envied the contented mind of this girl who accommodated herself so uncomplainingly to her cheerless lot, and who, although ruined like himself by her father's death, had never once thought of putting an end to her life. "She is more courageous than I am," he reflected. "It is true, though, that she hasn't stolen anything." And for the first time since their meeting in the street, he looked at her attentively. She was not beautiful, in the ordinary acceptation of the term. Her forehead was a trifle too low; her nose not of the Grecian type. Her lips were rather too full, and her chin too prominent. But what a complexion, and what eyes! What teeth, too! A pink and white complexion, lustrous brown eyes, sparkling with intelligence, and small, even, white teeth of dazzling brilliancy. And above this attractive face there was a mass of chestnut hair curling naturally.

"You know, sir, that wealth isn't happiness," the girl resumed, "and that one ought never to despair. I might have killed myself like many others, but I preferred to live; and I am succeeding wonderfully well. Is not my example worthy of being followed?"

"Yes," murmured the young man, "when a man is only hard up, suicide is cowardice."

"Then your troubles, I suppose, are troubles of the heart," said his neighbour, laughing. "Pshaw! they are not worth killing one's self for. I can speak only from hearsay, however, for I have had no experience in such matters; but I nursed one of my acquaintances who took laudanum because a young man abandoned her after promising to marry her. She did not die, however, and she solemnly promised me not to repeat the attempt, for she found that the scamp had long been playing her false with one of her friends."

"Do you think there are no other troubles but troubles of the heart?"

"Why shouldn't you tell me yours? Because you don't know me? That is true, you don't even know my name. I forgot to tell it you. It is Elizabeth Babois—not a very pretty name, is it? However, every one calls me Babiole, and I am so accustomed to this nickname, that now I almost think it is my real one. Well, sir, Mademoiselle Babiole begs you to confide your sorrows to her. It is very audacious on her part, perhaps; but she knows that it is a comfort to tell one's difficulties to a friend. If I were in trouble, I would tell you, and ask your advice before taking any desperate step."

"My mind is already made up," said André, gloomily.

"Then you admit that you are meditating self-destruction," exclaimed Babiole. "You certainly can have no mother, then?" André turned pale. His mother! He had forgotten her, for he had been on the point of blowing his brains out, without writing to her, or asking her forgiveness for leaving her alone in the world. "If you still have a mother, you surely cannot think of killing yourself," continued Babiole.

"I have a mother, but not in Paris," was the reply, "She resides in the provinces."

"Then you are only temporarily in Paris?"

"I have come to stay," replied André, evasively.

"Will your mother come to live with you?"

"I think not."

"Ah, if I had a mother I could never make up my mind to leave her. But you, no doubt, have your reasons for residing at a distance from her—you have, perhaps, found a situation in Paris, and your mother prefers the country. I am like her. I should much prefer running about the fields to sitting cooped up in a work-room all day."

"That is only natural at your age."

"Oh, if I were thirty, it would be just the same. I like the open air and exercise. Shall you continue to share Monsieur Marbeuf's rooms? The apartment is rather small for two persons."

"Much too small," answered André, who was beginning to grow impatient.

Babiole perceived it, and resumed: "I beg your pardon, sir. I forget that you are in no mood to discuss such trifles. It is all the fault of my temperament. I cannot remain serious for any length of time. Madame Divet often scolds me for chattering thoughtlessly when I ought to weigh my words. However, you pretend that you are not thinking of suicide,

but I see very plainly that you have merely told me so to get rid of me. You won't succeed, however, unless you consent to let me take this revolver away with me."

"I cannot do that, mademoiselle. It does not belong to me."

"It belongs to Monsieur Marbeuf. I am aware of that. But I sha'n't keep it, for I haven't the slightest desire to use it. I will return it to its rightful owner to-morrow."

"Do you think I can find no other way of destroying myself, if I wish to do so?"

"No, and unfortunately, I shall not always be here to watch you; but your friend will soon return, and when he's here I shall feel less anxious. It is solitude that puts such horrible ideas into your head."

"I am expecting Louis, it is true," said André, "and it surprises me that he has not yet returned."

"Is that why you were watching the clock?"

"Yes, he promised me to be here before midnight."

"And because he is a few minutes late you want to shoot yourself! Did any one ever hear of such folly? In the first place, you are not familiar with his habits, as you arrived only this morning. I know them, though we are not even on speaking terms. He scarcely bows to me, in fact, when we meet on the stairs. But my window is directly opposite his, and I never see a light here before one o'clock in the morning. He spends all his evenings at some café."

"But he is not spending this one there, I am sure of that," muttered André, shaking his head despondently.

"Then you know where he is. Yet another reason why you shouldn't feel uneasy. He promised to return, and he hasn't been punctual; but even if he does stay out all night, you must admit that this isn't a sufficient reason for putting an end to your life. Confess that there is something else. Has Monsieur Marbeuf gone to do something upon which your future depends?" André could not repress a start of surprise. This child had in a measure divined the truth, and he was astonished at her sagacity. "I see by your face that I have discovered the cause of your resolve," she continued. "You fancy that he dares not return, because he has failed. That is not a sensible conclusion, by any means. Don't you know the proverb: 'No news is good news?'" André shook his head sadly. "In any case, you would risk nothing by waiting. He will have to return, eventually; and it will be time enough for you to blow your brains out when you learn that you have nothing more to hope for. Recollect that you will, perhaps, hear that the matter about which you feel so anxious is satisfactorily arranged."

This argument made an impression upon André. At the age of twenty-five a man does not take leave of life without regret, after all.

"Ah! I have succeeded in convincing you, I see that," resumed Babiole. "You have a face that betrays your every thought. Now, it only remains for you to promise me that you will postpone the execution of your frightful project until to-morrow. When you have taken the required oath, I will go off and I won't return again until after daybreak."

"So be it. I give you my word of—"

"That isn't enough. Swear by your mother's life."

André had decided to wait until the morrow, and yet he hesitated to give an oath to that effect. He was annoyed, and even ashamed to allow himself to be thus influenced by Mademoiselle Babiole, a *grisette*, who had meddled in the most inexcusable manner with his affairs. The young

fellow had not yet cast off the prejudices of a provincial man of fashion. He classified women according to their toilets, and was greatly astonished to find that a poor girl of plebeian origin possessed both heart and intelligence. "I do not believe in taking oaths," he murmured.

"But I do in the present instance," retorted Babiole, "for I know that you would not dare to break it. If you refuse to do what I ask, I assure you that I sha'n't stir from here, and you won't try to turn me out by force, I hope."

"I swear, then," said André, his patience nearly exhausted.

"That is proper. My mind is easy now. Good-night, neighbour; I must be at the shop at nine o'clock in the morning, so I will drop in to see you about eight. I hope I shall find you in a better mood, and that Monsieur Marbeuf will have returned with good news for you. I'm going now, and I leave the revolver with you. I trust you, you see."

As the girl spoke she rose up, offered André her hand, and then hastened from the room. André, left alone, soon relapsed into a state of cruel perplexity. He was obliged to admit that Babiole's advice was excellent, and that he had done well to follow it; but his situation had in no wise changed for the better. It was even growing worse every moment, for there were still no signs of Marbeuf. His absence seemed inexplicable. André racked his brain to devise a reason for it without finding a satisfactory one. The only chance was that M. Vernelle might not have been at home, and that Marbeuf was waiting for his return. But, then, even if he had dined out, or escorted his daughter to the theatre, he would have returned home by one o'clock in the morning. "Unless he has taken her to some great ball," thought the young man, unconsciously clinging to the last hope. "And yet people don't go to a ball before ten o'clock, and Marbeuf left me at half-past eight, and the Rue Bergère is not more than ten minutes' walk from the restaurant where we dined, so the banker would still have been at home. Louis is incapable of appropriating the money; he must have been killed and robbed, or else run over by a vehicle, and in either case the money hasn't been restored, so that I am lost. However, I will wait until eight o'clock, as I promised; then, or as soon as this worthy young girl, who has interested herself in my welfare, takes herself off, I will put an end to my life."

André spent the rest of this terrible night wandering about his friend's rooms, listening attentively to the sounds in the street without—sounds which gradually grew fainter and fainter, and soon ceased entirely. Each time the house-door opened to admit some belated inmate, he went out upon the landing to see if he could recognize Marbeuf's footfall, and each time he met with a fresh disappointment. After about six hours of suspense, dawn appeared—the dawn of a gloomy, cloudy, winter's day. Vehicles began rumbling briskly to and fro, doors open and shut, and house porters set to work, sweeping halls and stairs. The house where Marbeuf lived was an old one and there were plenty of draughts, so that a cold fog crept into the room, chilling André to the very marrow of his bones; nevertheless, his resolution remained unshaken. He now had barely time to write to his mother before Babiole arrived, and to pen a few words of farewell for Louis, in case the latter should return. Accordingly, André seated himself at the table where the revolver was still lying, and began a letter to Marbeuf, feeling that it would be the less difficult of the two to write. "My dear Louis," he began "I do not blame you. You tried to save me but could not. I gave myself a respite; it has just ex-

pired. I have condemned myself, and I am about to carry the sentence into execution. I will not live dishonoured, I must die, since I have stolen —yes, stolen, whatever you may say to the contrary.

Engrossed in his writing, he saw and heard nothing that was passing around him, but suddenly a hand was laid on his shoulder, and springing up, he found himself face to face with a gentleman whom he did not at first recognise.

“Who are you?” he exclaimed.

The stranger, before replying, took possession of the revolver and the unfinished letter, put them both in his pocket, with wonderful assurance, and then sat down as coolly as if he were at home, and said: “I am tired out. Your stairs are terribly steep, and I climbed them three at a time. It seems that I was only just in time.”

André did not repeat his question, for a moment’s scrutiny had enabled him to recognise the unexpected visitor, none other than M. Vernelle’s cashier.

“He has come to have me arrested,” thought André, “and it is to prevent me from killing myself that he has taken possession of the revolver. But the window remains, and I won’t be captured alive.”

“I have had no end of trouble in discovering your abode,” continued this singular visitor. “I have been looking for you for twelve hours or more, but it was only this morning that I obtained this address. You must suspect why I wished to see you, for this is not the first time we have met.”

“I recollect having seen you yesterday in Monsieur Vernelle’s private office.”

“And somewhere else, as well. We were near neighbours at a restaurant where I occasionally take my meals. But you were not alone at the time, unfortunately, so I could not speak to you. I intended to follow you, in order to ascertain where you lived, and I waited for you in the Rue Lafayette. Your friend left you at the door of the restaurant, and I fully intended to take advantage of this opportunity to accost you, but just as you started off in one direction, and he in another, I was stopped by a block of vehicles, and lost sight of you. Still I was not discouraged. I knew your friend’s name, as he has often been to our office for his employers who bank with us, and I felt sure that you had gone straight to his house on your arrival in Paris. So I went to his employers, Messrs. Pivot and Garnier, in the Rue du Sentier, to inquire his address, but I only found an errand-boy who could not give me the desired information. This morning, at six o’clock, however, I rang at M. Pivot’s door, and he must have taken me for a madman, but he finally told me that his clerk, Marbeuf, lived in the Rue Lamartine. I took a cab; the doorkeeper down stairs told me that Marbeuf’s rooms were on the fourth floor; the key was in the lock, so I opened the door softly, and here I am!”

André had listened in wonder to this strange explanation which certainly did not enlighten him. “It was well that I made haste,” continued the cashier. “Had I delayed even ten minutes longer, I should have been too late, I fear.”

“I don’t understand you,” stammered André.

“Oh, you need not try to make me believe that it was only by chance that that revolver was on the table, and that you were writing a farewell letter to your mother.” And, as André hung his head, in silent consternation, the visitor continued: “This contemplated suicide was a most senseless and absurd thing. Death repairs nothing, and when a man’s guilty of

a fault he must repair it, especially when one hundred thousand francs are involved. That is a large amount, even to Monsieur Vernelle, and when a man has taken it, he must begin by making restitution. After that he has a right to blow his brains out, but not before. Oh, attempt no denial. I saw you take the money."

"You saw me!" exclaimed André, wildly.

"Yes. There is a small sliding window between my office and my employer's private room, and this window was partially open at the time. When Monsieur Vernelle left you alone, I had curiosity enough to glance and see what you were doing—"

"And you did not at once denounce me to your employer?"

"No, indeed; I am not obliged to give my reasons; still, I have no objections to telling you that I feel a sincere compassion for you, not only on account of this affair, but on account of my respect for the memory of your father whom I knew very well, indeed."

"You, sir?"

"Yes. I have been in Monsieur Vernelle's employ for many years, and am well aware of the service Monsieur Subligny rendered him in past times. Your father, in helping my employer, killed two birds with one stone, for I should have been thrown out of employment, and reduced to penury, had Monsieur Vernelle failed, as he certainly would have done but for your father's assistance." This unexpected announcement gave André a gleam of hope, though but a feeble gleam, for, by reason of Marbeuf's strange disappearance, he could no longer restore the money. "But, now I think of it, I have not yet told you my name," continued the cashier. "It is Chantepie, Jules Chantepie, and we may call ourselves compatriots, for Havre was your birthplace, and Rouen mine. There is necessarily sympathy between Normans, and I should always reproach myself if I ruined a promising young man's future, simply because he was guilty of a moment's weakness. I don't regret having acted as I have, as I have found you in the midst of preparations for self-destruction; for if you were not honest at heart, you would have crossed the Channel before now."

"I thank you for having judged me right. If you but knew! It was the merest accident that caused my ruin. I had not the slightest intention of keeping the bank-notes. I did very wrong to touch them. Monsieur Vernelle came in suddenly, and I had not time to replace the package on the table."

"So you involuntarily slipped it into your pocket. This is an explanation I should not recommend you to give to a magistrate, if questioned. But the matter will not go so far; it will remain between you and me. You have repented of the act, and that is enough for me. Still, that is not a sufficient reparation, and I am surprised that you haven't sent the money back."

"That was the first idea that occurred to me upon leaving Monsieur Vernelle's office."

"You did not carry it into execution, however."

"I beg your pardon. I lacked the courage to take the money back myself—I should have died of shame—but Marbeuf devised a way to save me. His plan was that he should go to Monsieur Vernelle and tell him that having found a package of bank-notes in the courtyard of the house, he had come to the conclusion that one of the clerks must have dropped it there."

"Not a bad scheme that, for you; but not equally good for me. It

would have cost me my situation. A banker does not keep a cashier who makes a mistake of one hundred thousand francs in counting eight hundred thousand. But when and where, if you please, was this restitution to be carried out ? ”

“ Last night. I gave the money to Marbeuf while we were at dinner, and he was to go straight to Monsieur Vernelle’s on leaving me.”

“ He wouldn’t have found him at home. Monsieur Vernelle had engaged a box for last evening, at the Renaissance, where a new play was to be performed for the first time, and he must have left home very early with his daughter.”

“ But he must have returned home after the performance.”

“ Of course ; he is not in the habit of staying out all night. Your friend only had to wait for him.”

“ Perhaps he did so ; I don’t know.”

“ You have not seen him since ? ”

“ No, sir. I waited for him in vain all night, and as he has not returned, I can only think that some misfortune has befallen him. He has been robbed, or even murdered, perhaps.”

“ You believe that ! ” sneered M. Chantepie ; “ you certainly are an artless fellow. You have proved it conclusively by intrusting such an amount to a penniless young man. Your Marbeuf probably took the first train for the north, and is in England or Belgium by this time. He has no reason to fear any extradition treaty, as he stole nothing from Monsieur Vernelle, and you will hardly enter a complaint against him.”

“ Marbeuf hasn’t left the country. Marbeuf is an honest man. He has been my friend from childhood. He was my chum at college—”

“ A great reason, that. Do you know what he has been doing since ? ”

“ He has been acting as clerk in a business house.”

“ Where he does not bear a very enviable reputation. I have made inquiries concerning him, and find that he is only held in moderate esteem by his employers. It matters little, however, whether he has absconded or not, for no one will believe the story you have just related to me. You alone are responsible for Monsieur Vernelle’s loss.”

“ I know it,” replied André, “ and it is for that very reason I wish to put an end to my life. Why do you interfere ? What is your motive in coming here ? To denounce me ? Very well, go for a commissary of police if you like. He won’t find me alive—but spare me useless reproaches, and relieve me of your presence.”

M. Chantepie was silent for a moment, and then he gently said : “ Don’t you understand that I have come to save you ? ”

“ To save me ? You ! ” exclaimed Subigny.

“ Yes,” replied Chantepie, quietly : “ as I just told you, I am under obligations to your father, for if he had not come to my employer’s assistance, the bank would have suspended payment, and I should have lost my situation. The service he indirectly rendered me is not one of recent date, it is true, but I have not forgotten it, and it is only natural that I should desire to pay my debt of gratitude. You thought, however, that I was sent by Monsieur Vernelle, and that I came to seize you by the collar and drag you to the nearest station-house. Not so ; I don’t confound a slight delinquency with a theft, or an honest man with a scoundrel.”

“ Then you think that I told you the truth, and that I had no intention of taking the money ? ”

“ Yes. I witnessed the whole affair, as I told you once before, and I

noticed the movement of surprise which proved so unfortunate in its consequences. You showed a want of presence of mind, that is all."

"But Monsieur Vernelle can never be made to believe that, and as he must have discovered that one hundred thousand francs were missing, he must know that I took the notes. I am none the less grateful to you for your kind intentions, however, and on the point of dying it will be some consolation to me to know that I have not lost your esteem."

"Don't talk any more about dying. You will live to be an old man, and I would gladly exchange my prospects for yours."

"I will not live dishonoured!"

"There you are again! How absurdly you talk! You are not in the least dishonoured. My employer thinks you a most deserving and honourable young man, for he hasn't the slightest suspicion that the money was ever in your pocket, or that it is even missing."

"Why, the money was to be drawn at six o'clock last night."

"Yes, by a man named Bertaud. Well, while you were in the office, that gentleman called to say that he would not draw the money until the following day. It was to see him that Monsieur Vernelle left you a moment, and it was arranged between them that the money should be kept all night in my safe. You had no sooner gone out than Monsieur Vernelle, after glancing hastily at his watch, called to me through the window, and handed me the packages of notes which I immediately locked up in my safe. The whole operation barely took a minute, as I overtook you on the staircase. It is true that I did not go through the form of counting the money, as I knew very well how much was missing and where it was."

"And instead of arresting me, you allowed me to go my way unmolested?"

"Yes, and I will now tell you why. In the first place, I had just learned that you were Monsieur Subigny's son, and nothing in the world could have induced me to denounce you, knowing that. Then, too, I pride myself upon being something of a physiognomist; and after seeing you, I was satisfied that you would return the money. I wanted to test you, to leave you free to act. I said to myself: 'night brings counsel;' besides, I intended to have a talk with you at the first opportunity. But unfortunately, I lost sight of you at the restaurant door, and I almost missed finding you again; but even if I hadn't succeeded, my mind was made up. I should have saved you even then."

"But how?"

"I should have paid Bertaud the eight hundred thousand francs this morning. The contents of the safe are not verified every day, and I felt sure that I should succeed in finding you, and that you would eventually restore the money. The idea of your committing suicide never once occurred to me, nor did I foresee that you would think of such a thing as confiding the money to an untrustworthy person."

"Marbeuf has not stolen the money. Marbeuf is dead or else he has been robbed."

"Which amounts to about the same thing, for the money is now irretrievably lost."

"And you will be compelled to divulge the fact."

"Never."

"But, if you are silent, sir, the loss will be discovered the first time the safe is examined, and you yourself will be accused of appropriating the money. I would rather die than allow an innocent man to be suspected."

"I don't doubt that in the least; but no one will be suspected. I have taken my precautions, and I shall make up the deficiency out of my own pocket."

"You, sir?"

"Yes, and to prove the truth of my words, I will show you that I have the package all ready," said the cashier, pulling half way out of his pocket a package of notes exactly like the one which André had abstracted.

"This is really too kind!" exclaimed the young fellow, moved to tears.

"I will not allow you to make such a sacrifice for me."

"The sacrifice won't ruin me. It would be hard if I hadn't succeeded in laying by a little money during the twenty years I have been at work. I am not rich, but I am in comfortable circumstances. Besides, I have no intention of making you a present of the amount. You would refuse to accept such a gift, and my means wouldn't allow it. I only lend it to you."

"I shall never be able to repay the loan."

"Nonsense! you will repay it in less than a year." And noting André's air of astonishment, Chantepie added: "My dear fellow, you seem to be ignorant of your real value. Your physical and intellectual endowments constitute a very handsome capital. You will only have to learn to make good use of them, and that knowledge will be speedily acquired." André blushed. Marbeuf, only the evening before, had spoken similar words of encouragement, but these sounded strangely out of place in the mouth of M. Vernelle's cashier. "Oh, you need not take offence," continued Chantepie. "You won't have to resort to unscrupulous means to make your way in the world. You will only have to follow the promptings of your heart, for I suppose that Mademoiselle Clémence doesn't appear unattractive to you."

"Mademoiselle Vernelle is very charming, but I do not see—"

"You do not see that she loves you already. Well, I do. After your departure, she spoke of you in terms which I will not repeat for fear of offending your modesty. I know her, and I am sure of what I tell you. Vernelle, who only sees through his daughter's eyes, has a very high opinion of you, and when he knows you better, he will be even more kindly disposed towards you. For this reason, I predict that you will be my employer's partner and son-in-law by next year, consequently my employer, for I hope you won't dismiss me when you become the head of the house," concluded M. Chantepie, smiling.

"Should this dream ever be realised, I could not do enough to prove my gratitude," replied André, promptly.

"I am sure of that; so the service I render you is not as meritorious as it seems to be. It will prove a very profitable investment for me."

"But a very risky one."

"On the contrary, a very safe one. I run no risk whatever, for I shall request you to give me a note for the amount I shall advance with interest at six per cent. per annum."

"On these conditions I might perhaps accept your offer, and yet—"

"You hesitate! What can I do to persuade you? I must extricate you from your embarrassing position; for if the truth should become known, I should be held responsible for the deficiency, and be compelled to make it good? Come, as we have no bill stamps here, sign me a receipt. Have you pen, ink and paper handy? Yes? Then sit down and write what I dictate."

André seated himself at the table, though not without some reluctance, while the cashier dictated. "I hereby certify that Monsieur Chantepie has

paid into the safe of Monsieur Vernelle, banker, in my stead the sum of one hundred thousand francs, due by me to said safe, and I hereby promise to refund him that amount five years after date."

"It seems to me that you can sign this without compromising yourself," added Chantepie, "and it is sufficient security for me."

André did not hesitate an instant, but signed the paper at once. "That is all right, now," said the cashier. "But it occurs to me that you ought not to give me this receipt until I have deposited the money, now in my pocket, in the safe."

If André had felt any doubts of his new friend's integrity, this warning would have instantly dispelled them. His only answer was to hand the receipt to M. Chantepie, who folded it and placed it in his pocket-book, saying as he did so: "You are now my debtor. Will you also be my friend? That is my most earnest desire."

As he spoke, he extended his hand. André took it and shook it cordially; but he was too much overcome with emotion to express his gratitude in words. A rap at the door interrupted the scene. On hearing the sound M. Chantepie's countenance changed, and he rose abruptly. One would have said that he was afraid of being found in conversation with his new friend. André was less surprised. He felt almost sure that the newcomer was Babiole, for she had told him that she would return at eight o'clock. "Why didn't you tell me you were expecting some one?" asked the cashier, rather testily. "Can this be Monsieur Marbeuf returning?"

"No, unfortunately," replied André. "Marbeuf would not have rapped. The key is outside the door, and he would have come straight in."

"Open it, then; but not a word on the subject we have just been discussing; and above all, don't mention my name."

André was spared the trouble of opening the door, however, for before he could reach it, Babiole entered the room, but paused, abashed, on perceiving a stranger. "Excuse me," she murmured, "I knew that you were not alone, for I heard some voices, but I fancied you were talking with your friend, Monsieur Marbeuf, so I ventured—"

"You did quite right, mademoiselle. This gentleman is also one of my friends, and his presence need not disturb you."

"Then Monsieur Marbeuf hasn't returned?" inquired the young girl, endeavouring to distinguish the features of this stranger who kept his face sedulously averted from her.

"No, mademoiselle, but I no longer feel any anxiety on his account."

"Really?" she asked. "How glad I am to hear it! This gentleman has probably brought you good news, then?"

"Yes, mademoiselle, very good news."

"Then I am truly grateful to the gentleman, for I felt very anxious. You did not go to bed, nor did I. I watched you pacing to and fro until morning. Then I couldn't wait any longer, so I dressed myself, and here I am! But I cannot remain; I must go to the shop at once; besides, I don't want to disturb you."

"Nor would I detain you, mademoiselle; but we shall see each other again."

"I hope so—and if you—"

Just then M. Chantepie, who seemed to be annoyed, rather than amused, by this exchange of civilities, made an impatient gesture and his face turned towards the light. Babiole, on her side, did not complete her sentence, but of people who had come out of the theatre were lounging about smoking and

stood with her lips parted and her eyes riveted upon the cashier, who hastily turned his back upon her. André felt that M. Chantepie was anxious for the visit to terminate; so taking the young girl's hand he led her gently towards the door, saying in a low voice: "Thanks! You saved me. But for you, the good news would have come too late. This evening I will explain everything."

To his great astonishment, Babiole allowed herself to be led from the room without a word, she who usually chattered like a magpie. But as soon as they reached the landing, she hastily turned to him and whispered: "Beware of that man. He is a bad man." And without waiting for a reply from André, who was still holding the door partially open, she ran swiftly down-stairs.

"Who is that girl?" inquired M. Chantepie, drily. "And how did you become acquainted with her?"

"She is a milliner who has rooms on the same floor, and last night, when I was on the point of blowing my brains out, she saw me with a revolver in my hand, and came here to prevent me from shooting myself. Had she been a single moment later, you would not have found me alive this morning."

"And in your gratitude you probably made certain disclosures to her."

"None whatever, sir," replied André, a little annoyed by M. Chantepie's tone and manner.

"You can't make me believe that she did not ask you why you wanted to kill yourself."

"She did ask me; but I only gave her a very vague explanation. I merely told her I had troubles, without telling her what they were."

"Even that was saying too much. I hope, however, that you have no idea of carrying the intimacy any further."

This time André's anger was really aroused, and he curtly said: "I am your debtor, sir, and I shall never forget it; but that is no reason why you should treat me like a school-boy."

The cashier saw that he had gone too far, and with a sudden change of manner, he said: "You must not be offended with me. It was only my interest in you that prompted the warning. Recollect that this affair must be kept a secret between us, if we are to avoid being compromised, and I haven't much confidence in a woman's discretion. But I am alarming myself unnecessarily, for I am sure you will return to this apartment only to take away your trunk. You will surely see but little of that girl. The private secretary of one of the richest bankers in Paris can't live in a dingy house like this."

"Monsieur Vernelle advised me to find some rooms, and I shall follow his advice. Still, if my friend Marbeuf should return, I shall continue to visit him."

"What! you still entertain hopes of his return? You have too good an opinion of him. Rest assured you will never see him again. It is useless for us to tarry here any longer. You will come with me, won't you?"

"Where?"

"To our employer's, of course. He expects to see you at nine o'clock; We can reach the Rue Bergère in ten minutes; but it is better to be ahead of time than late. Monsieur Vernelle is a monomaniac on the subject of punctuality, and he will be delighted to find you in his office."

André momentarily forgot Marbeuf's mysterious disappearance, and the singular warning Babiole had given him. He even forgot to write to his

mother and inform her of his good fortune. "But I can't go as I am," he muttered.

"Oh, I will give you time to wash your face and hands. As for your clothes, they are the same you had on yesterday, and they will do very well, I think."

However, André made a rather less hasty toilet than that recommended by the cashier, who meanwhile strode restlessly up and down the room. He was evidently in a hurry to get away. "You are superb, my dear fellow," he exclaimed, when André was ready. "Mademoiselle Clémence will fall head over heels in love with you. I certainly made a mistake in the date of the marriage. I said in a year. You will be married in six months." André said nothing, though the remark greatly annoyed him. "Let us start," said the cashier, eagerly, turning towards the door. André locked it, and left the key with the doorkeeper in passing out. He still cherished a hope that Marbeuf would call for it; and on reaching the street, he paused to see if his friend was not in sight. Chantepie gave a slight shrug of the shoulders; and they walked down the Faubourg Montmartre without speaking. But at the corner of the Rue Bergère the cashier paused to say: "I think it would be as well to take some precautions. No one ought to know that I have been to your house. Vernelle thinks I have not seen you since last evening; and if any of the employés of the establishment see us together it might occasion remark. So I will go round by the Boulevard Poissonnière and the Rue Rougemont, while you follow straight on. I will take the clerk's staircase; you had better use our employer's. Try to appear at ease in his presence, and when he introduces you to me, you must pretend not to know me. Bye-bye, my dear friend." Then, as if with sudden recollection, he exclaimed: "Why, I took Monsieur Marbeuf's revolver away with me."

"You can keep it. I have no further use for it," replied André with a smile.

III.

A MONTH has elapsed. André has entered upon his duties as private secretary, and discharges them in such a manner as to fully deserve the praise that M. Vernelle lavishes upon him. He now works ten hours a day. He has mastered the intricacies of the business. Accounts no longer have any secrets for him; he is equally at home with the business correspondence, for he is familiar with English, German, and Italian, and he writes French much better than his employer. Being a capital penman, he would, if necessary, make an excellent book-keeper. He himself was greatly surprised to discover that he possessed these business talents; but they had simply remained in a dormant state, because he had never had occasion to make use of them. He possessed them, however; his father had been a merchant; it was in the blood. In character, also, André has greatly changed. The thoughtless and extravagant man of fashion has become a serious and industrious man of business, beginning work before the appointed hour, and dining frugally in order to save as much of his salary as possible. He has already returned his mother two hundred francs of the money she had advanced him for his travelling expenses, and he has so arranged his expenditure that he can send half of his salary to Madame Subligny every month.

It is true, however, that M. Vernelle paid all the expenses attendant

upon his installation in his new quarters. A week after his arrival in Paris, he was able to settle down in a cheerful and prettily furnished suite of apartments in the Rue Rougemont, only a few steps from his employer's house ; and on his arrival he found a receipt for the first quarter's rent and the upholsterer's receipted bill lying on the mantelshef of his sitting-room. Moreover, as if to justify Monsieur Chantepie's predictions, M. Vernelle at once introduced André, not only to his chief employés, but also to the principal customers of the house, and to his business friends, very much as he would have presented a future partner. No one was very much surprised at the new-comer's good fortune. Some were rather jealous, perhaps, but all were compelled to do justice to his merits ; besides, André had a way of making himself as popular with petty clerks as with great capitalists. He even succeeded in winning the goodwill of the formidable broker, Bertaud, though he never could speak to him without emotion, for the sight of this man recalled the most painful recollections of his life.

On the morning following the terrible night on which he had been so near death, everything passed off exactly as Chantepie had predicted. M. Vernelle received André with open arms. M. Bertaud called for his money, and took it away after carefully counting it. The deficiency having been made good by the cashier, the only trace that remained of the unfortunate affair was the remorse that lingered in André Subligny's heart. He had not forgotten his fault, though it seemed to him sometimes that it was all a dream ; and his gratitude towards his benefactor was as profound as ever. They met very seldom except during office hours, for they lacked the same tastes, but they were on the best of terms ; and whenever André attempted to refer to the services rendered, the cashier interrupted him by saying gaily : " Not another word or you will offend me. We will resume this conversation next year, when you become my employer."

Still there was one point that troubled André—the mysterious disappearance of Louis Marbeuf. No one had seen him since that eventful night, nor had anything been heard of him. At the end of a week the doorkeeper of the house where he resided informed the district commissary of police of his prolonged absence, and an inquiry was set on foot, but without result. André was questioned on the subject, but he took good care not to tell all he knew. In Paris, such mysterious disappearances are by no means rare ; nocturnal attacks are still less so, but on the night which André had spent in waiting for his friend no murders had been reported, nor even any sudden death, nor any discovery of a lifeless body in the streets. André went to the Morgue, but he only saw there a few persons who had perished by drowning, and who did not in the least resemble his missing friend. Messrs. Pivot and Garnier were unable to give him the slightest information about their clerk, and did not conceal the fact that they intended to fill his place. Marbeuf, having no relatives in Paris, André was unable to push the investigation further, and he was unwillingly constrained to share the views of M. Chantepie, who persisted in the opinion that Marbeuf had crossed the frontier, as he did not fail to tell the young secretary from time to time, whenever opportunity offered. " Your Marbeuf has crossed the Atlantic and become a naturalized citizen of the United States by this time," the cashier would say. " He will discover a gold mine in California, perhaps, and repay you some day or other."

These jests annoyed André greatly, but he was unable to make any retort, for the conduct of the missing man really seemed unpardonable ; and the young secretary finally came to the conclusion that Louis had allowed him-

self to be tempted by the large amount of money intrusted to him, and that he would never return. André had naturally gone to the Rue Lamar-tine for his trunk, M. Vernelle having advised him to take up his abode temporarily in some furnished rooms in the Rue Bergère, pending the preparation of the apartment in the Rue Rougemont; and on going to Marbeuf's, he had left a letter for him, in case he should return; however, he failed to see Babiole, who was not at home; and he did not meet her on a second occasion, when he called to inquire of the doorkeeper if Marbeuf had come back.

Still, he had not forgotten the young girl's warning respecting Chante-pie. "Beware of that man; he is a scoundrel!" But then André was one of those persons who close their hearts against suspicion. When he liked a man, he liked him thoroughly; his gratitude to the cashier was boundless. He believed in him implicitly, and did not wish to be undeceived. Moreover, he attached very little importance to the girl's opinion, and firmly resolved to silence her if she ever ventured to speak disparagingly of the cashier in his presence, for he had by no means renounced the idea of seeing her again and having a talk with her.

Such was the state of affairs one month after the incidents previously recorded, and André was gradually recovering from the effect of the many shocks he had experienced, when one morning M. Vernelle, who had gone out in the morning, something very unusual on his part, sent his valet to summon his secretary to lunch. André eagerly obeyed the summons, for he knew that Mademoiselle Vernelle would be at the table, but just as he was leaving the room, he met Chante-pie, who whispered: "Our employer has received bad news, and he isn't in a good spirit. I thought it best to warn you."

This confidential disclosure astonished André, who wondered what the tidings could be, for it had never occurred to him that the rich banker's peace of mind could be disturbed by any loss whatever, and a suspicion that M. Vernelle had in some way heard of the theft of the bank-notes flashed across his mind. "There has been a heavy failure at Marseilles," continued Chante-pie, shrugging his shoulders, "and we shall probably lose a couple of million francs. Vernelle will never listen to me. I warned him that the firm was foolishly speculating with wheat, but he only laughed at me."

"How unfortunate!" exclaimed André, sincerely grieved.

"Oh, Vernelle could stand such a loss as this without feeling it, but he has been playing for a rise at the Bourse—still against my advice—and Rentes are now falling fast. There'll be a nasty business on settling day, Bertaud may go under—and I sha'n't regret his failure much—only the governor has been propping him up, and if he comes to grief, why, our firm will lose heavily."

"It is no wonder, then, that M. Vernelle should be depressed in spirits," remarked André.

"To say nothing of the fact that his health seems to be failing fast," quietly continued Chante-pie. "His nervous attacks are becoming more and more frequent, and despite all the bromide he takes, he is very queer indeed at times. His physician told me so."

"Good heavens! you really terrify me!"

"The moral of all this, my dear fellow, is that you must make haste and marry Mademoiselle Clémence before her father's financial blunders reduce her to comparative poverty. So press your suit. I know that it is prospering finely. Rose, the young lady's maid, tells me her mistress talks of no

one but you. Matters would progress even more rapidly, if you chose. I fear that you have been a little timid so far ; but young girls do not like faint-hearted lovers. So come to the point, my boy, and mark my words, you will see the effect."

"The effect would be disastrous," answered Subigny quickly, "and I do not feel inclined to make the venture."

"So much the worse for you. You will end by being left out in the cold. If I advise you to go ahead, it is for your own sake, and a little for my own, for though I was delighted to be able to do you a service, I shouldn't care to lose my money. I know perfectly well that you have assured your life for my benefit, but I don't want you to die ; besides, there is every probability that you will outlive me. Now excuse me for detaining you. I only wished to make you acquainted with the situation." Thereupon M. Chantepie re-entered his office, leaving the young secretary to his reflections.

The poor fellow was completely bewildered. M. Vernelle's misfortunes touched him as deeply as the cashier's language shocked him. The indifference and levity with which Chantepie announced coming misfortunes, and, above all, his advice respecting Clémence Vernelle, greatly surprised and irritated André ; the more so as the speaker was his benefactor, and he had hitherto been greatly attached to him. "He seems to think that I have placed myself completely in his power," thought André. "I will let him see that he is mistaken. I owe him a debt of gratitude, it is true, but I am still master of my heart and my actions. I love Mademoiselle Clémence, but I certainly have a right to keep my love a secret, if I choose ; and I sha'n't expose myself to the dangers of a refusal. Monsieur Chantepie may think what he likes about it—it makes no difference to me. He has just shown himself to me in a new light. I wonder if little Babiole was right, after all, when she advised me not to trust him ?"

André now hastened into the room where the banker lunched every morning with his daughter and his secretary. The meals were usually delightful ones. The banker came in first, as a rule, bringing Subigny ; then Clémence entered, fresh and cheerful, threw her arms round her father's neck and kissed and hugged him as she had done in the days when she still played with doll and hoop. The different dishes were all placed on the table beforehand, and each person helped himself. The presence of servants would have been a constraint, for this was the hour of familiar conversation. M. Vernelle really had no other time to himself during the day. He became young again, and laughed heartily at all Clémence's jests and pranks. From the very outset he and his daughter had treated André as if he had been a member of the family, and the young fellow's behaviour had justified this cordiality. He had plenty of wit and tact, and, what is far better, sound common sense. He talked well, and he was a good listener. Attentive and grave, when the father happened to refer to some business matter which had been previously discussed in the office, he was never at a loss when the daughter engaged him in conversation upon theatricals, painting, or even dress.

That morning as he entered the room, late, for the first time, he perceived, at a glance, that the banker was greatly pre-occupied. His eyes were sunken, and his lips well-nigh colourless, while his drawn features indicated both mental and physical suffering. Clémence, on the contrary, had never been in more exuberant spirits. The rise and fall of stocks and financial panics did not affect her in the least. Her sky was always cloudless, and melancholy was a thing unknown to her. "You have come at

last, sir," she exclaimed, as soon as she caught sight of André. "It is very naughty of you to keep us waiting, especially to-day, for papa is terribly out of spirits, and I need your assistance in amusing him."

"You must excuse me, mademoiselle," stammered Sublingy. "Monsieur Chantepie detained me—"

"He was talking business, I'll warrant. He has no right to do so after the clock strikes twelve, and I am going to complain of him to papa if he ever does it again."

"What are you talking about, child?" interposed M. Vernelle. "Take a seat, André. You mustn't be surprised if I am not in the best of humours this morning. I had one of my nervous attacks last night, and I am troubled with indigestion as well."

André saw that his employer did not wish that any allusion should be made to his business troubles, and he was about to inquire more particularly about his health, when Clémence prevented him from doing so by exclaiming: "And you said nothing to me about it, and I nearly forgot to give you your medicine. Fortunately, I have the bromide in my pocket. Quick, hand me your glass, so I can put the prescribed dose into it. Now do me the favour to take it before you begin lunch."

M. Vernelle swallowed, with a grimace, the bitter draught that his daughter had just prepared for him. "It is very unpalatable," he remarked, "and it seems to me that I have been growing worse ever since I began this treatment; I wrote to the doctor last night, and am expecting him here this morning. I want to consult him."

"He will tell you not to work so hard."

"It is impossible for me to do otherwise just now. Business matters require my closest attention, and they must have it—at whatever cost to myself," the banker added, gloomily. "But let us talk of something else. Have you heard from your mother, lately, my dear André? She is well, I hope."

"Perfectly well, sir. She is very happy, and it is to you that she owes her happiness. She blesses you every day."

"Why won't she come and pay us a visit?" inquired Clémence. "I am so anxious to know her."

"If you did know her, mademoiselle, I am sure you would love her almost as much as you must have loved your own mother."

This remark produced an effect that André had not foreseen. M. Vernelle turned pale, and dropped his knife and fork; Clémence blushed, hung her head, and gave her undivided attention to the very simple task of removing the shell of a boiled egg. André realised, when it was too late, that he had been guilty of a terrible blunder. It had never before occurred to him that M. Vernelle might not be a widower. Neither his father nor mother had ever spoken to him of Madame Vernelle, and yet they had often spoken of the banker, and had sometimes mentioned the daughter; but of the wife—never a word.

When André handed his letter of recommendation to M. Vernelle, on his arrival in Paris, the banker had lost no time in introducing him to his daughter, but he had never said: "I will present you to my wife." During the past month, too, André had had abundant opportunity to satisfy himself that his employer was living alone with Clémence, and the thought of inquiring into the particulars of his marriage had never once occurred to our friend. M. Chantepie, who, undoubtedly, could have enlightened him, had never made any allusion to the subject. Why, then,

did the father seem agitated, and why did the daughter blush at the mere mention of a Madame Vernelle? Had the father never been married, or had Madame Vernelle conducted herself improperly, and the family been broken up in consequence of some scandal? At all events, André had certainly put his foot in it, as the saying is. With his eyes riveted upon his plate, he sat for some moments, pretending to eat; then, glancing up, he saw that Mademoiselle Vernelle was looking at him with a compassionate air, as one looks at a guest who has just broken a glass, or upset a decanter.

"My father has promised to take me to some watering-place this summer," she said at last, forcing a smile, "and he leaves the choice of the place to me. I have selected Havre, and I hope my father won't refuse you leave of absence at the same time. In that case, you can introduce me to Madame Subligny. At her age, a journey is very fatiguing, and we shall thus avoid giving her the trouble of coming to Paris."

M. Vernelle nodded his approval, but said nothing. He seemed to be suffering terribly. André stammered a few words of thanks, and the conversation again ceased. "I have certainly committed a terrible blunder," thought the poor fellow, "and Heaven only knows if Monsieur Vernelle will ever forgive me. I have certainly wounded him deeply, although quite unintentionally."

Clémence had not abandoned all hope of reviving the conversation, however, for she suddenly exclaimed: "How do you spend your evenings, Monsieur André? We seldom see you after the office closes. Do you often go to the theatre?"

"No, mademoiselle, I have not been there since I came to Paris."

"Then you must go with us some day. By the way, father has a box for the Opéra Comique this very evening. Are you fond of music?"

"Very fond of it."

"Then you will enjoy hearing the 'Pré-aux-Clercs;' I know it by heart, but I never tire of listening to it. You will accompany us, won't you?"

André glanced at M. Vernelle.

"I am not sure that I shall be able to take you there," said the banker. "I have an appalling amount of work on hand; besides, I don't feel well."

"All the more reason why you shouldn't remain at home," rejoined Clémence. "You have not gone out in the evening for a month; in fact, you haven't taken me to the play since the day you first introduced Monsieur Subligny to me, in your office. That evening, we went to the Renaissance. I remember it as if it were but yesterday, though I must confess that I scarcely heard a word of the play."

It would have been difficult to tell André more plainly that their first interview had made a profound impression upon her, and that the happy day was still fresh in her memory. He blushed with pleasure, and also with shame, for this allusion to the past reminded him of his fault, and of Louis Marbeuf, who had so mysteriously disappeared.

"But I shall listen religiously to the 'Pré-aux-Clercs,'" continued Clémence, "and if you, father, go to sleep as you usually do, I shall still have some one to talk with, as Monsieur Subligny will be there. It is decided, is it not?"

"I can't promise," said the banker. "If I feel better, and my evening isn't taken up, as I fear it will be, by a very important matter, we will see."

"'We will see' is too vague. Insist with me, Monsieur André. My father won't refuse you; and you certainly richly deserve the pleasure of

hearing my favourite opera, for you have been hard at work ever since your arrival."

"I am at Monsieur Vernelle's orders," stammered Subigny.

"Clémence forgets that I release you at six o'clock every day," said the banker, smiling; "but she does quite right to offer you a seat in our box. When a man works as steadily as you do, a little diversion is a good thing, and I expect you lead a regular hermit's life. Recollect that this house is always open to you. It is not a very gay one, unfortunately, but you will always find a cordial welcome, a cup of tea, and a seat by the fireside. Not this evening, however, as Clémence seems determined to drag me to the theatre; but there is nothing, I hope, to prevent you from joining us there."

"He consents at last!" exclaimed the young girl, clapping her hands. "I trust that you are not going to refuse," she added, turning to André.

"I should be only too happy, mademoiselle, if—"

"If you refuse, I shall think you prefer your other friends to us."

"I have no other friends, mademoiselle."

"Indeed! Why, I was under the impression that you stopped with an old school friend when you first arrived in Paris?"

"Yes, mademoiselle, but I have not seen him recently. He has gone away—he has left Paris," replied André, in embarrassment.

"Ah! what has become of the young man?" inquired M. Vernelle. "He was a clerk in a mercantile house, was he not?"

"Yes, sir; but he has found a better position—abroad." André did not care to tell the truth in regard to Louis Marbeuf's disappearance, and with good reason. M. Chantepie, who was acquainted with the facts, had kept them secret, and André could hardly have told them to M. Vernelle without confessing his own fault.

"So, when your day's work is over, you are left alone?" remarked the banker.

"Yes, but I am not idle," said Subigny, quickly. "I have so many things to learn that I don't lack occupation."

"So you don't associate with any of my clerks?"

"I see Monsieur Chantepie occasionally."

"Then you certainly go to the cafés," replied M. Vernelle, laughing. "Chantepie is a model cashier, but when his accounts are adjusted, and his safe locked up, he only thinks of amusing himself, and spends his time in playing billiards and dominoes."

"I have accompanied him to the café a few times out of politeness, but we haven't the same tastes."

"I congratulate you on the fact, and advise you not to become too intimate with him; not that he is a bad fellow, by any means, but he was very indifferently brought up, and he is destined to remain in a subordinate position. You have a right to look higher."

"You are very kind, sir. Your good opinion is my only capital in life, however, and I am not ambitious."

"But you ought to be. I was no better off than you are when I began life, and you see that—"

At this moment the door opened, and a servant appeared to announce the arrival of the doctor. "Show him in," said M. Vernelle. And turning to André, who was rising to leave the room, he added: "You are not in the way. The doctor will decide whether I can safely go to the theatre this evening. You had better stay and hear what he says."

Dr. Valbrègue was still a young man, although he held the position

of chief physician at the Necker hospital. In addition to his incontestable talent, he had the good fortune to be endowed with a most prepossessing face, and a genial disposition. He smiled at Clémence, gave André a keen glance, and said to the banker, as he shook him by the hand : " Well, how does the bromide suit you ? Are you feeling any better ? "

" I must say that your compound is the most nauseous stuff imaginable, my dear doctor," M. Vernelle replied.

" Unfortunately we have not yet devised a way to cure nervous diseases with sweetened water," was the doctor's laughing reply. " The question is whether the medicine is doing you any good or not ? "

" Not much, I am afraid."

" Indeed ! how do you feel ? "

" I am greatly troubled with dizziness. In fact, I am often obliged to cling to something to keep myself from falling while I am walking."

" That is the natural effect of the medicine. Is that all you have to complain of ? "

" No ; I often have painful spasms. I cannot sleep, and I have less and less appetite every day."

" That certainly is not due to the bromide. Where do you buy it ? "

" At a chemist's my cashier recommended to me."

" What does your cashier meddle in the matter for ? Please deal with Mialhe. He's the right man—the one safe chemist in Paris. Have you any of the preparation here ? "

" Here is some, doctor," said Mademoiselle Vernelle, drawing a small packet of powder from her pocket.

" Very well, I will take it away with me and have it analysed at the hospital. Experience has made me distrustful in such matters."

" Do you suppose any one is trying to poison me ? " asked the banker, laughing. " I warn you that you will get into trouble with my daughter if you do, for it is she who administers me the dose before each meal."

" I suppose nothing of the kind. I don't even accuse the chemist of carelessness, but I like to know something about the quality of the medicine I prescribe. The slightest error may be fatal in its consequences. Only a few weeks ago I lost a patient who had taken thirty milligrammes of strychnine, instead of the three milligrammes I had ordered. The chemist had made a mistake."

" You frighten me, doctor. I sha'n't dare to take anything after this. Drugs very seldom agree with me. Why, at this very moment, every muscle in my body seems to be twitching convulsively, and I feel as if some one were trying to strangle me. I experience the same feeling whenever I take the bromide."

" Well, take no more of it until I see you again, and in the meantime, work less. You must have rest and diversion."

" And go to the theatre often, eh, doctor ? " interposed Clémence, quickly.

" Yes, on condition that he only sees bright and cheerful plays. To forget his cares and amuse himself, that's what your father needs."

" And that is just impossible," murmured the banker.

" But we think of going to hear the ' Pré-aux-Clercs ' this evening," exclaimed Clémence.

" Indeed, well I cordially approve of this new remedy," rejoined the doctor. " It will be a pleasant change from this bromide which has such a singular effect upon you."

" Now, father, you no longer have any excuse for refusing."

"So I won't refuse. We will go to the Opéra Comique. André will accompany us, I hope?"

The young man bowed, colouring with pleasure, and as the doctor, who had never met him before, seemed to be looking at him attentively, M. Vernelle exclaimed: "Monsieur Subligny, my secretary."

André exchanged bows with M. Valbrègue, who gave his patient's daughter a keen glance. The clever physician had evidently fathomed the situation, and to judge from his manner, he did not disapprove of it. "Now, my dear financier, I must leave you," he said, rising. "I have an appointment to meet three fellow-physicians at the hospital at two o'clock. We are to hold a consultation over a very singular case—a man who has lost his memory entirely in consequence of a severe fall."

"That is very extraordinary, certainly," muttered M. Vernelle, abstractedly.

"Not so extraordinary as you suppose. Concussion of the brain often produces this effect, though I have never seen so complete an instance. Would you believe it, the person in question has not only entirely forgotten the accident that reduced him to this condition, but he has even forgotten his name. We have not yet been able to discover either who he is, or what happened to him. As his skull sustained no fracture, he recovered very rapidly from his injuries. He talks, and very sensibly, too, about matters and things in general, but he can recall nothing whatever of the past."

"Are you sure that he isn't deceiving you, doctor?"

"Perfectly sure. I have subjected him to various tests, and always with the same result. The idea that he, perhaps, had some reason for wishing to conceal his identity, occurred to me, as it did to you, so the police were informed of the facts, and the man was examined by several detectives. No one recognised him, however. Besides, he does not at all look like a criminal. He has an honest face, and he was very well dressed when he was picked up in an unconscious state."

"In the street?"

"Yes, and the strangest thing about it all is, that he did not meet with this fall on the spot where he was found. His wound must have bled very freely, and yet there was no blood on the pavement of the Boulevard des Invalides, where some labourers found him one morning as they were going to work."

"Then he may have been placed there after being nearly killed in some wine-shop brawl?"

"No; an examination of the wound satisfied me that he was not injured by a weapon, but that, in falling from a considerable height, his head came in violent contact with some hard body. I cannot swear to the facts, of course; but I am inclined to believe that after a more or less prolonged syncope he recovered sufficiently to get upon his feet and walk a short distance; then his strength failing him, he sunk fainting upon the sidewalk, where he must have spent nearly all night, for he was half frozen when he was brought to the hospital."

"That is very strange. But hadn't he any papers about him?"

"Not a letter, not even a visiting card; nothing but sixty francs in his pocket, which proves that he wasn't attacked by thieves. They would have searched and robbed him."

"But what are you going to do with the poor fellow?"

"I think of sending him to the Saint Anne Asylum, where he will be received as a lunatic, although he isn't one. But I haven't lost all hopes of

curing him, and I shall keep him as long as I can, for his case is worthy of careful study. Besides, the police are naturally inquisitive, and although they have ceased to investigate the affair, they would not be sorry, I think, to be enlightened respecting the identity of this unknown patient. When he becomes an inmate of the asylum no one will see him; but at the hospital visitors are admitted twice a week—Thursday and Sunday—and there will perhaps be some one who can tell us the name of the man we call Number Nineteen. But I must be off now. I will call to see you again on the day after to-morrow, my dear Monsieur Vernelle, and in the meantime, remember my prescription: rest, and plenty of amusement. Mademoiselle, I leave it to you to see that my instructions are carried out."

Having said this, the doctor took leave of them all with a pleasant bow, and M. Vernelle, who had risen to accompany him to the door, returned, shaking his head. "Rest, and plenty of amusement," he said. "One can't purchase these remedies at a chemist's, unfortunately."

"No, but one can find them elsewhere," replied Clémence, gently; "and we will see that you have them this evening; will we not, Monsieur André?"

"I should be only too happy if I were able, and if your father would allow me, to contribute to his amusement," stammered Subigny.

"Then it is settled," said the banker. "You must join us, André, at the theatre this evening. Clémence will tell you the number of our box. I don't invite you to dine with us, because you will be detained at the office a little later than usual to-day, if you attend to the matters I spoke to you about, and you will barely have time to dress. Besides, I have to go out now, and I don't exactly know when I shall get back."

André returned to the office, greatly preoccupied by what he had just seen and heard. During this repast, which had lasted but three quarters of an hour, he had learned more about the Vernelles than during the whole of the preceding month. In the first place, he had unwittingly satisfied himself of the existence of a skeleton in the household. The father and daughter evidently had some secret which they were concealing from the world. The emotion they had been unable to hide when André referred to Madame Vernelle, proved this conclusively. Dr. Valbrègue's remarks had been equally surprising. He had admitted the possibility of poisoning by the substitution of one drug for another, and had spoken with strange indifference of a mistake which had recently cost a patient his life. The precaution he had taken in carrying off the bromide to be analysed, plainly indicated the suspicion which had occurred to him, but which André considered too absurd for belief. While thus reflecting, the young secretary sat down at his table, and when he began his work he gradually forgot the incidents which had occurred during lunch, or rather the only one that he remembered was the invitation to the theatre and Clémence's encouraging glances. She had almost made advances to him, and her father, who had certainly perceived it, did not disapprove, as he had offered Subigny a seat in his box. And yet, André's joy was not unalloyed. He would have preferred a less rapid progress towards the goal. It seemed to him that the father and daughter did not know him well enough to give him so much encouragement. He, of course, could not suspect them of being actuated by mercenary motives, but he felt that there must be some reason for the marked preference they showed him. Instead of flattering himself that he owed it solely to his personal appearance and attainments, he concluded that there must be some stain on the family honour, and that he was indebted to this stain for having been chosen in spite of, or rather on account

of, his poverty, as it was supposed that he would be less exacting. These suppositions were by no means agreeable; nevertheless, André realised that his heart was given beyond any possibility of recall to his employer's charming daughter. So he continued to dream of the joys that the coming evening had in store for him, and he made more than one mistake in the writing he had to do. And yet, no one was there to disturb him, for M. Vernelle had gone out immediately after lunch, and had announced that he would not return until late. This absence was highly significant. Nothing save matters of the greatest importance could have induced the banker to abandon the superintendence of his business, even momentarily; hence, it seemed probable that he was making some desperate effort to maintain his credit, or negotiating a loan to repair the breach made in his capital by a defaulting debtor and some unfortunate speculations.

André could do nothing, but he said to himself that misfortune seemed to have fallen upon this formerly prosperous house almost simultaneously with his arrival; and he wondered if he might not have what is familiarly known as the evil eye. These reflections, and others of a similar character, somewhat marred his anticipations of a pleasant evening with Mademoiselle Vernelle, who did not seem to have the slightest suspicion of her father's financial embarrassment. Immediately after breakfast, she had sent André the number of the box, with a message to the effect that she would certainly expect to see him. It was evident that she looked forward with great pleasure to listening to her favourite opera in his company. André, in spite of his anxiety, resolved to keep the appointment, and made all possible haste to finish his correspondence in order to return home, dress, and dine, so as not to keep her waiting.

He finally completed the last letter he had to write, and he was about to place the whole correspondence upon M. Vernelle's desk, so that it might be signed before his employer's departure to the theatre, when he heard the bell of the telephone ring. The banker often made use of this ingenious invention in communicating with his principal customers, and it was usually André who applied his ear to the tube, and transmitted the questions to M. Vernelle, who gave his answers without rising from his chair. In the present instance André thought it his duty to act exactly as if M. Vernelle were there, and then, if the question proved puzzling, to reply that his employer was absent. He therefore approached the instrument, inquired who the speaker was, and waited. "It is Jean Bertaud," replied the telephone. "Are you there? There is something fresh."

The name of Bertaud made André start. It was that of the owner of the famous eight hundred thousand francs—the speculator whose speedy ruin had been predicted by M. Chantepie, and with whom M. Vernelle had entered into a sort of partnership in stock speculations. André had often met this bold speculator, and was, indeed, quite a favourite with him, though he had never made any attempt to win his good opinion, for he thoroughly disliked him. Bertaud had all the failings common to *parvenus*. He was arrogant, ill-bred and vain. He boasted of his wealth on all occasions, and snubbed every one who was poor; and yet, he honoured Subigny with friendly hand-shakes which the latter would certainly have dispensed with had he been in a situation to do so. However, André was well aware that Bertaud's interests were closely connected with those of his employer, and he felt sure that the coming communication had reference to the crisis which threatened both the broker and the banker.

"There is something fresh," Bertaud had said, through the telephone,

and this was evidently the preface to news from the Bourse—perhaps good, perhaps bad, but important, in either case. Had a secretary a right to receive it in his employer's stead? André thought not, and so he hastily replied: "Monsieur Vernelle has gone out, and did not say when he would return."

Then he listened, expecting to hear something like: "Tell him that I will call to see him at such an hour," or, "Who are you? Are you authorised to take his place?" But, to his intense surprise, the response was: "So much the better. We can talk freely. I am glad to tell you that we are both safe. I have hedged all right." And, as André remained silent, the telephone continued: "Come and take supper at the Helder at midnight. I will explain the trick to you, and we will laugh over it together. There will be some ladies there. The guilty mother has unearthed a girl fit for a king. Come and see her."

This was going altogether too far. Such a communication could not be addressed to Monsieur Vernelle, a grave and irreproachable family man. André dropped the tube that had brought him this strange message. He did not wish to hear any more, still less to be obliged to reply to it, and he was about to resume his seat, when the sudden opening of the little window that connected the cashier's office with the banker's, made him turn his head. "Whom are you talking to, my dear fellow?" inquired M. Chantepie, with his elbow on the sill.

"With Monsieur Bertaud," replied André; "but I can't make any sense of what he is saying. I began by informing him that Monsieur Vernelle was not here, and he replied by telling me something about a trick he has played upon some one, and about a supper."

"Oh, there must be some mistake. That communication was not addressed to the governor, of course. Some one has made a mistake with the tubes. I'll set the matter right. Don't answer."

André knew that there was a second telephone tube in the cashier's office, so it was not difficult for him to explain the mistake. Bertaud had fancied he was talking to Chantepie, and the latter, warned a little too late, now hastily engaged in conversation, through his own tube. But about two minutes afterwards he returned to the window, and said with a slightly embarrassed air: "Bertaud is certainly losing his senses. He is engaged in speculations which may ruin him, and yet he only thinks of gadding about. It was me he was inviting to go on a lark with him to-night, but pray believe that I have sent him about his business."

"I didn't know that you were so intimate with him," remarked Subligny.

"Oh, intimate isn't the word. Bertaud lives well. He denies himself nothing, and occasionally gives very fine dinners, to which he invites me. I accept because I am fond of good cookery, but that doesn't prevent me from keeping him at a distance, and if he comes to grief, why, so much the worse for him."

"It doesn't seem likely that he will. He just remarked through the telephone that he had hedged, and that you had nothing to fear."

"Oh, I understand. I asked him about a week ago to buy me a few Northern Railway shares—a little speculation quite within my means, and as the stock has fallen since then, he meant to say that he has made the matter all right by one of his many devices."

"But he doesn't seem to have covered M. Vernelle."

"Who knows? He's very cunning, and if any one can help the governor out of his difficulty it's certainly Bertaud. He's serious when it's necessary

and knows the Bourse better than most other speculators. He has no doubt operated for Vernelle all right, and I shall be delighted to see the governor out of this mess. But hullo, it's five o'clock," added Chantepie, turning to glance at the clock in his office. "I am going to shut up shop now, and I advise you to do the same. Monsieur Vernelle won't be back until dinner-time. Come and take a glass of absinthe with me at the Café Frontin."

"Thanks, but I never drink absinthe. Besides, I have some matters at home to attend to."

"Then we will give it up, and I will accompany you as far as your door. It is on my way, you know."

André felt a strong inclination to refuse, for M. Chantepie's society was becoming more and more distasteful to him; but he remembered that the cashier must know what had become of Madame Vernelle, and this was a good opportunity to question him in an indirect way, and without appearing to attach any importance to the matter. "All right," he replied, after a moment's reflection. "I am going down now. Meet me in the courtyard."

Chantepie closed his window. Subligny gathered up the letters, placed them on the banker's desk, took his hat, and left the room.

The cashier was awaiting him at the foot of the stairs, and slipping his arm through Subligny's he gaily asked, "Well, how did the lunch pass off, and how is your affair with Mademoiselle Clémence progressing?"

"What affair?" asked Subligny, coldly.

"Your love-affair, of course. The father was present, I know, but he can't see beyond the end of his nose, and you might easily have scored a point or two; unfortunately, however, I see by your face that you have not yet relinquished playing the part of a silent lover."

"I never told you that I was in love."

"True, but I guessed that you were; and I repeat that your success depends entirely upon yourself. By the way, Vernelle and his daughter are going to the Opéra Comique this evening. If I were in your place, I would drop in there, and then go and pay your respects to our employer, who could hardly fail to offer you a seat in his box. In that case, make the most of your opportunity, and, above all, don't fail, at the first chance you have of being alone with the girl, to obtain from her a promise to marry you. The father will perhaps growl a little when his daughter confesses that she has engaged herself without his permission, but I know him—he will give his consent eventually."

André might have replied that he had already received an invitation to join the father and daughter at the theatre; but he was unwilling to confide his good fortune to a man whose intentions he could not consider above suspicion. He even felt that the moment had come to put an end to these troublesome importunities. "Excuse me," he said, impatiently, "but I should really like to know why you insist so much on this subject. I haven't forgotten that I am under obligations to you, but though it is my warmest desire to repay the money you advanced to me, I am not disposed to submit to unreasonable exactions on your part. I would rather confess my fault to Monsieur Vernelle than relinquish my right to manage my own affairs according to my liking."

The shot told, and M. Chantepie changed his tone. "You do wrong to take offence, my dear fellow," he said, with an air of contrition. "I never once thought of trying to exert any authority over you, and Heaven forbid

that I should taunt you with the service I rendered you. You are at perfect liberty to marry or not, as you please, of course, only where there is a will, there is a way, and if you are so anxious to free yourself from your debt to me—”

“I am very anxious to do so, of course; but if Monsieur Vernelle is on the brink of ruin, as you pretend, it isn’t by marrying his daughter that I shall be able to accomplish the matter.”

“He is in danger, but he may escape ruin, for all that. I even hope that Bertaud will save him; and in any case, Mademoiselle Vernelle will have the fortune of her mother, who married under the separate property system.”

“Her mother!” exclaimed Subligny, remembering the scene at the lunch-table.

“Yes; she had six hundred thousand francs, which were of great assistance to Vernelle in starting his banking-house; and unless she has spent them—”

“She is dead, isn’t she?”

“Oh, no, indeed. On the contrary, I imagine she is in excellent health!”

“What! isn’t Monsieur Vernelle a widower?”

“No, unfortunately for him. But ten years ago his wife left him. She ran away one fine morning with a gentleman—who was not her first lover, by any means—and nothing has been heard of her since her flight. Some persons suppose that she is in America. I thought you were aware of all this, for your father knew it, and I am surprised that he never spoke to you about our employer’s domestic troubles.”

“He never did.”

“That explains your ignorance, then. He probably had his reasons for being silent. But you seem to be overcome with consternation. How absurd! Mademoiselle Clémence isn’t to blame for her mother’s delinquencies. I would willingly vouch for her virtue, and you can marry her in all confidence, if your heart prompts you to do so. But here you are at your door, and as you don’t like absinthe, I will leave you. Don’t forget my advice. Strike while the iron is hot, and good luck to you!”

IV.

MARCH had scarcely begun, and yet the weather was delightful—it was one of those warm spring evenings so often followed by a chilly morrow, but which draw even the most quiet Parisians out of doors. The boulevards were crowded; and there was a great competition for seats in front of the cafés. André, taking advantage of the pleasant weather, walked to the theatre, where he was to meet M. Vernelle and his daughter. He had dined alone at a little restaurant on the Boulevard Bonne-Nouvelle, and, though he had dressed beforehand, it was still early, so he was not obliged to hurry. The performance of the “Pré-aux-Clercs” would not begin until nine o’clock, and he did not care to be the first to reach the box in which he now almost regretted having accepted a seat. Indeed, never had he felt less inclined to enjoy listening to good music.

M. Chantepie’s revelations had filled him with consternation. Nothing could be more distasteful to him than the idea of falling in with the views of this man who urged him to marry with such strange persistence, and who seemed, at the same time, to take pleasure in showing him the skele-

tons in the Vernelles' cupboard; the disgrace that had clouded the past, and the probability of future ruin. André now understood why Clémence had hung her head, when he had spoken of her mother; and he wondered more and more why he had never before heard a word respecting this unfortunate affair. His parents could not have been ignorant of it. Why had they neglected to mention it to him, if only to prevent him from committing a painful blunder, like that of the morning? They might have foreseen what would happen. It was also necessary for him to look the situation, as described to him by the cashier, calmly in the face.

What was Chantepie's object in urging him to marry the banker's daughter? Was it really because he hoped, in this way, to secure the speedy payment of the money advanced to André? Subligny was beginning to doubt it, and to wonder if Chantepie were not secretly conspiring against his employer, and if M. Bertaud were not in league with him. This broker, who sent such singular messages through the telephone, did not seem to be very anxious to extricate his partner, Vernelle, from his embarrassment. On the contrary, he merely seemed to think of saving himself; and judging from what he said, he had succeeded. Hence one might well suppose that Chantepie was conspiring with him, and that the pair of them were betraying the banker to whom they both owed so much. Should he, André, denounce them? He thought of doing so, but he could furnish no convincing proofs of his suspicions; besides, he could not forget that Chantepie had saved him by lending him a hundred thousand francs to replace the money which had disappeared with Marbeuf. He could not repay this kindness with ingratitude, and yet he was resolved not to submit to Chantepie's domineering authority. There was but one way to escape from it, however, and that was to tell M. Vernelle everything, and leave his fate in his hands. But if he did this, he would be obliged to renounce Clémence, M. Vernelle might forgive his misdemeanour, but he would no longer be disposed to give him his daughter in marriage. And what a moment this would be to retire from the field! Just as ruin seemed about to overtake M. Vernelle, and the former millionaire's only child was in danger of finding herself without a dowry, and without a future—for her mother's conduct must be known, and no doubt it was of a kind to keep most suitors at a distance. "It would be cowardly," André said to himself, as he walked thoughtfully along the Boulevard des Italiens. "For the present I will display a prudent reserve in my intercourse with the father and daughter. I will also keep a sharp watch on Monsieur Chantepie, and if he ventures to give me advice which sounds too much like an order, I will tell him very plainly that I must be allowed to manage my own affairs. Should he declare war against me, I shall try to find some weapon that will enable me to hold my own. I will question that girl who told me to beware of him. She knows his past, and she will tell me what he has done. Poor Babiole! I have deferred thanking her too long. I really owe my life to her. If she hadn't come in just as I picked up Marbeuf's revolver, I should have been buried a month ago. To-morrow is Sunday; I shall be at liberty, and I will take advantage of the opportunity to go and see her. She won't be at work, and I hope I shall find her at home. She told me, I know, that her employer sometimes took her to the Champs Elysées; but I will call very early."

Absorbed in these reflections, André reached the Opéra Comique. The performance had begun at eight o'clock with a one-act piece preceding the "Pré-aux-Clercs." The first intermission was now taking place, and a crowd

chatting. André paused for a moment, near a newspaper-kiosk, to wait until the crush was over. He did not think it probable that M. Vernelle had yet arrived, and he hoped to recognize the banker's carriage as it passed. While watching for it, he suddenly caught sight of a man whom he fancied he recognized. This person, who was of medium height, but very stout, carried an enormous bouquet which he seemed to be trying to hide under his overcoat, which was unbuttoned. A sudden change in his attitude at last showed André the coarse red face of Bertaud, the speculator. "What can he be waiting for?" the young secretary said to himself, stepping back behind the kiosk. "Probably for the creatures he invited to supper. It isn't time yet; but perhaps he sent them to the theatre while he attended to some business. Possibly he has learned through his friend, Chantepie, that Monsieur Vernelle will be at the theatre this evening, and he doesn't care to meet him. In either case, I did as well not to tell Chantepie that I was coming, and I would rather that Bertaud did not see me."

Having come to this conclusion, André turned up the collar of his overcoat, pulled his hat down over his eyes and waited. A few seconds after he saw a cab draw up near by, whereupon Bertaud darted forward to open the door, and began to assist a portly female of mature age in alighting. She almost fell into his arms, but it was not for her that the bouquet was intended, for he lost no time in getting rid of her, and again turned to the vehicle which contained a second person. This one, however, seemed to be in no hurry to alight, and, indeed, the stout woman was obliged to resort to earnest entreaties to induce her to do so. She finally stepped out; and while Bertaud was paying the driver, she took the arm of the matron who accompanied her. It was with the utmost difficulty that André repressed a cry of surprise. He had recognized Babiole, the girl to whom he was indebted for a service which he could never forget. All his illusions respecting her were abruptly dispelled. He had really supposed her to be a modest and industrious girl, but what could he think of her now?—there she stood in the society of a scamp like Bertaud, and of a woman of questionable appearance. However, when Bertaud offered her the bouquet, she refused it as André saw, and thereupon it was accepted with a great deal of fuss by the buxom matron. André concluded from this that Babiole did not care for the broker's attentions, and that she had not expected to meet him, and this reflection made the young fellow's mind easier. The fat woman was no doubt Babiole's employer. Indeed, she looked just the kind of person to keep a second-class millinery establishment. Babiole's sulky manner now showed plainly enough that Bertaud's company was anything but agreeable to her, and finally the old scoundrel concluded to beat a retreat: not, however, without having held a private conversation with the elder woman. It was short, and evidently satisfactory, for the broker walked away with a complacent air. Babiole and the woman who acted as her chaperone then entered the theatre, and André, who had thus far escaped observation, took good care not to show himself.

This unexpected meeting had changed the whole current of his thoughts. He had not forgotten Mademoiselle Vernelle, but he could not help thinking of this mere child who had saved his life, and who was now evidently in great danger, exposed as she was to the machinations of Bertaud and the female who accompanied her. "I can't allow this!" muttered André, stamping his foot angrily. "I once delivered her from the persecution of a passer-by, and she repaid me an hundred-fold! I will watch over her during the performance, and when it is over, I will be at hand to see her safely home."

An instant's reflection moderated his ardour. He recollected that it would be impossible for him to leave M. Vernelle's box during the performance, and that he must afterwards escort his friends to their carriage; besides, Mademoiselle Vernelle had good eyes, and she would not fail to notice him if he spoke with a young and pretty girl. And he was more than ever anxious not to offend Clémence, for this evening would perhaps decide his destiny. How was he to reconcile his hopes as regards Mademoiselle Vernelle with his resolve to defend Babiole? He finally decided that the best thing to do was to give no sign of his presence at the theatre, but to be on hand at the critical moment. He knew that Bertaud intended to sup at the Café du Helder; consequently, he need only mount guard at the door of the restaurant to prevent the girl from entering it.

André did not even ask himself if she would accept him as an escort, or what would be the consequences of his interference. Having thus made up his mind, he gave the number of M. Vernelle's box to an attendant, and as he ascended the stairs of the theatre he had the mortification of finding that the first act of the "Pré-aux-Clercs" had just begun. A lover should never be late. André had made a bad beginning. He was obliged to summon all his courage before he ventured to enter the box, for he feared he would be ungraciously received; but a pleasant surprise awaited him. Two hands were cordially extended to him; and the father waved him to a seat beside the daughter, who, in her turn, smilingly motioned him to remain silent, for she was unwilling to lose a single note of Herold's delightful music. André noticed with a sensation of profound relief that M. Vernelle looked more cheerful than in the morning, and he felt satisfied that the business matters which had troubled the banker were now satisfactorily adjusted. Bertaud had probably saved himself by some clever manoeuvre, and his partner had profited by his shrewdness. Thus the broker might be a libertine, but not a traitor; and André began to feel more amicably disposed towards him, although still determined to defend Babiole from his machinations.

But Babiole was soon almost forgotten in the happiness he experienced at finding himself near Clémence. When she leaned forward, her hand grazed André's, and she found his eyes riveted upon her face whenever she turned her head to see what he thought of the air that had just been sung. And M. Vernelle evidently approved of all this, for he smiled pleasantly, and his face wore a softened expression that his secretary had never seen upon it before. Besides, was not the seat he had assigned to André, sufficient proof of his cordial approval? His acquaintances certainly thought so. To show them his daughter seated beside André, in this public place, was, in their opinion, at least, quite equivalent to an announcement that the young man would soon become his son-in-law. The act seemed very short to Subigny, though he scarcely heard a note of the music. In fact, he did not even see the singers. He only had eyes for his pretty neighbour; and it was merely by chance that, just as the curtain fell, he glanced down at the dress circle and perceived Babiole looking up at him.

He coloured and drew back, but Babiole had recognised him, for she, on her side, blushed. All this escaped Mademoiselle Vernelle's notice, however. "What adorable music!" she exclaimed. "Do you admire it as much as I do? I was never so happy, and I should like every one around me to share my happiness."

André was about to assure her that he was in the seventh heaven of delight, but the banker checked him by saying, gaily: "It is I, who am the

happiest of all. In the first place, because you both are happy, and secondly, because I feel so much better this evening. The improvement perhaps, is due to the fact that I took no bromide before dinner. But the best news I have reserved for the last. My credit is saved. My house has just successfully weathered the worst storm it has ever encountered."

"What! father, you are talking business here!" interrupted Clémence. "If that is the effect the 'Pré-aux-Clercs' has upon you—"

"That is just like a girl! You can't realize that I have been on the verge of ruin. Only this morning I had no expectation of avoiding it. That was the reason I was so depressed in spirits. Finally an inspiration occurred to me. The fall of stock was ruining me, but I sent Bertaud word to sell twice as much as I had purchased during the last month. I risked my all, and was so anxious that I lacked the courage to go to the Bourse. Stock will be still lower to-morrow, but now I shall not only lose nothing, but make a million and a half. Your dowry, my dear child," he added, with a furtive glance at André, who scarcely knew whether to feel glad or sorry.

"Then you have doubtless seen Monsieur Bertaud?" he said, timidly.

"No, though I am rather surprised that he did not call on me after the Bourse closed. He has been too busy, however, even to send me a memorandum of the day's operations. But I know him too well to feel the slightest anxiety. Besides, he, himself, must have been exceedingly anxious, for he had as much at stake as I had."

"He announced the great victory to Monsieur Chantepie by telephone."

"There, I was sure of it. Chantepie ought to have informed me of it, however."

"But you hadn't returned when he left the office, sir."

"That's true. I was detained by the Marseilles failure. In that direction, unfortunately, we can't expect anything. Not even 15 per cent. But my good luck of to-day consoles me, and when I'm happy, I desire every one round me to be happy. What can I do for you, André?"

"For me? why, you have loaded me with benefits, sir, already. I desire nothing."

"Is that really true?" inquired M. Vernelle, rather mischievously.

"Well, I only desire one thing, that I may never leave you, and that you may always be equally fortunate in your business operations."

Clémence was nervously toying with her fan; and André asked himself what this conversation would lead to. Babiole in the dress circle was looking up at him, but for the moment he had no thought of her. "I also hope that you will never leave me," said the banker, gently; "but you cannot always hold the position of secretary. It does very well now, while you are young; but by-and-bye you must have something better. Besides, you forget your mother. I am sure she can't be reconciled to the idea of always being apart from you."

"My mother could easily be persuaded to come and reside in Paris."

"Yes, if you had a permanent position—an assured future. If you were married, for instance, well married."

"That is a dream which I fear will never be realized."

"But why, my dear fellow? Is it because you are too hard to please?"

"Possibly," faltered Subigny, with a furtive glance at Clémence.

"That is a pity, but on the other hand, it is better than being too modest. Ambition is an excellent thing in a young man; and it is certainly no dis-

advantage to have an ideal. I have some curiosity to know yours. You would naturally wish to love your wife, and to be loved by her in return ; but you would perhaps require something more ; wealth, for instance ? ”

“ No, sir, not at all. I would much rather marry a young girl without a dowry, provided she had courage enough to link her fate with mine. I would work unremittingly to make her rich, and I am sure that I should succeed. ”

“ These sentiments do you honour. But what if you should happen to fall in love with an heiress ? ”

“ That would be very unfortunate, for I fear she would suspect me of mercenary motives. ”

“ But what should you do in such a case ? ”

“ I think that I should wait until my fortune was equal to hers, before declaring my affection—and as I have nothing—”

“ You might as well say that you would pray for her to lose all her money,” M. Vernelle interrupted, laughing. “ You are hard upon the daughters of millionaires. If your ideas on the subject of marriage became general, well-dowered young ladies would be reduced to marrying fortune-hunters. It isn’t their fault, however, if their parents have so much money ; and it seems very unjust to make them bear the penalty of their birth. Ask Clémence what she thinks of your theories. ”

“ I think they are very wrong,” replied Mademoiselle Vernelle, unhesitatingly. “ If we are to believe Monsieur Subligny, one has perfect control over one’s heart. But does one ever know whom one will love ? And when one loves, does one trouble one’s self about secondary considerations ? If I gave my heart to any one, it would be his beyond recall. ”

“ That is going to the opposite extreme. How would it be if you should fall in love with a person who proved to be a thief, for instance ? ” asked M. Vernelle.

Clémence made a slight grimace as if to indicate that such a supposition was absurd ; but André turned pale, and averted his face. He remembered that the written admission of his crime was in M. Chantepeie’s hands, and that the cashier had only to produce it to ruin him. “ There is a happy medium between your extravagant ideas and our young friend’s exaggerated scruples,” remarked M. Vernelle. “ Upon this point, I am a kind of arbitrator ; and I should recommend you to abide by my decision if you wish to come to an understanding. ”

“ I am ready to make all due concessions, I am sure,” laughed Clémence. André dared not reply, but his eyes spoke for him.

“ I see that you are really both of the same mind,” continued the banker. “ You, André, forget that time and circumstances reduce every one to an equality. I but narrowly escaped ruin to-day, and I may be irretrievably ruined to-morrow, while you possess an inalienable capital : youth, intelligence, and industry. With these attributes, a man is sure to make his fortune. As for your feelings, Clémence, I think I understand them thoroughly ; but suppose you let me hear a description of your ideal. ”

“ Ah, well, I desire, above all, that my husband should be brave and good. I would have him love me for myself, love me forever, and never love any one but me ; for I should be very jealous of him, and I should never forgive him if he deceived me. ”

“ In a word, you are dreaming of perfection. Now as to physical attributes ? ”

“ I should be less exacting in that respect. I should be perfectly satis-

fied if he had a pleasant and intelligent face, distinguished manner, and if he were tall, slender, and had light hair."

"Enough, enough! André will certainly think you are talking about him."

Clémence smiled, instead of replying, but the smile was equivalent to a "yes" spoken at the altar. André cut a rather sorry figure, and most men would have been equally embarrassed under such circumstances, though a fortune-hunter might have emerged from the dilemma by profiting of the opportunity to make an eloquent declaration; André, however, was too much in love to have his wits about him, and his very awkwardness attested his sincerity. M. Vernelle came to his aid. The banker had become serious again, and now looking straight at both of them, he said:

"You understand—do you not?—that I have read your hearts, and that when I thus questioned you in a jesting way, it was for the purpose of inducing you to confess your feelings. This isn't customary, I know, in the society in which we move; but I detest false positions, and I thought it quite time to define yours. Am I mistaken?"

"If we were not here at the theatre, I would certainly kiss you!" exclaimed Clémence.

"Oh, sir," began Subigny in a voice broken with emotion, "how can I ever—"

"No protestations, my dear fellow," interposed the banker, "and above all, don't thank me. That would be premature. I must have a conversation with you to-morrow. There are several facts which you are ignorant of, but which you must know before pledging yourself. In the meantime, you must content yourself with pressing the hand my daughter offers you."

André did not need a second bidding. He was weeping with joy, and Clémence, who was equally disturbed, lowered her eyes to conceal her tears. They forgot, for an instant, that they were plighting their troth before hundreds of spectators, for the theatre was full, and a number of spectators present were taking advantage of the *entr'acte* to turn their opera glasses on the boxes. But what did they care for this scrutiny? They only thought of their happiness. André was overpowered by it, and Clémence, although perhaps not equally unprepared, enjoyed it none the less, for she had not expected that her father would so promptly consent to a desire which she had not yet dared to express.

"Calm yourselves, children, and turn to the audience," continued M. Vernelle. "People are looking at us, and I don't care to personate in public the benignant father who gives away his daughter on the stage."

The lovers turned and simultaneously caught sight of Babiole, who was devouring them with her eyes. She did even more. As André caught her eyes, she bowed to him, smiling. Mademoiselle Vernelle observed her do so, and turning to Subigny she inquired with surprise: "Are you acquainted with that young girl?"

"I have met her once," replied André. "She resides in the house where I stayed a short time with a friend, before living in the Rue Rougemont."

"You have only seen her once, and yet she recognizes you. She must have a remarkable memory. She certainly has a very pretty face. What does she do?"

"She is a milliner, I believe. At least she usually left the house very early with a band-box in her hand, so I always supposed she was going to some shop."

Mademoiselle Vernelle said no more, but André saw very plainly that she suspected him of not telling the whole truth. He could not enter into any

explanation which would only have made the situation more embarrassing, so he remained silent, though he secretly anathematized Bertaud who had provided Babiole and her companion with seats so nearly opposite M. Vernelle's box. It did not seem at all probable that the broker had done this intentionally, however, for he must naturally feel anxious to conceal his escapades. It is true, though, that he had not shown himself in the house, and indeed everything seemed to indicate that he would content himself with waiting for Babiole at the door of the theatre. The curtain rose again, and all conversation ceased, but Clémence was no longer listening to the music. She had picked up her father's opera glass and had levelled it at an opposite box, the door of which had just been thrown noisily open. André was troubling himself very little about what was going on around him, but as he sat with his eyes fixed on his betrothed, he fancied that he perceived her turning pale. Almost immediately afterwards, Clémence passed the glass to her father, at the same time directing his attention to the box which a rather noisy party had just entered. M. Vernelle turned the glass on this box, and André noticed, with very natural astonishment, that the longer he gazed the more distressed his countenance became. Indeed, a moment afterwards, the banker rose abruptly, and said to his daughter in a strained, unnatural voice : "Come, let us go."

Clémence had already risen to her feet, with her back turned to the audience. Her father had retreated to the rear of the box, and seemed to be waiting for her impatiently. André, springing up, hastened towards him, exclaiming : "What ! sir, are you going ?"

"I am compelled to do so," replied Monsieur Vernelle, curtly. "But you had better remain—"

"I don't care to, sir, if you—"

"Remain, I beg. I should much prefer your not accompanying us. Don't ask me for any explanation. I can't give it to you here. To-morrow you shall know everything. I do not regret having come, since I can now call you my son," he added, pressing Subligny's hand cordially, "but nothing in the world could induce me to remain another moment in this cursed theatre."

Clémence was so deeply agitated that she quite forgot to wish André good-bye ; indeed, she left the box almost without looking at him. Her father followed her, and immediately closed the door behind him. All this was done so hastily that André found himself alone before he had time to say another word, or ascertain the cause of this abrupt departure. What could have made the banker leave the theatre in the middle of the performance, and just as he had made his daughter and André happy ? The young secretary felt convinced that this hurried flight was in some way connected with the advent of the occupants of the opposite box. Who could these people be ? Certainly not creditors, for the banker had none ; and it was scarcely probable that he had enemies so dangerous and powerful that he was afraid of meeting them face to face. And yet he had fled, in the literal acceptance of the word,—fled without stopping to look behind him, dragging his daughter away with as much haste and trepidation as if threatened with imminent danger.

How was André to ascertain the truth ? The simplest way seemed to be to examine the persons who had perhaps unwittingly produced this effect. As it happened, M. Vernelle, in his agitation, had forgotten to take the glass away with him. Before making use of it, however, André glanced at the box which he saw was occupied by a woman and two men. The woman

was sparkling with diamonds ; and her companions were attired in the height of fashion. Subligny became more and more puzzled to understand why this fashionable group had so terrified the banker. He took up the opera glass, and as it was an excellent one, he was able to subject the faces which so greatly interested him to a careful examination. One of the gentlemen was old ; the other seemed to be about thirty, certainly not more. The elder one was a thorough aristocrat in appearance, somewhat bald, with a grey moustache and whiskers, keen eyes and a scornful mouth. The younger man was remarkably handsome, with the pallid complexion so many women rave over, very red lips and dazzling white teeth which he seemed fond of showing. His attire was irreproachable, and his bearing dignified. But at the same time he seemed too vain of his good looks ; and there was something artificial about his bearing. "If he were a Frenchman," thought André, "I would swear that he has not always displayed his dress-coat in proscenium boxes ; but he is evidently a foreigner, a South American, I should judge from appearances. The other also is a foreigner, out not of the same nationality."

He next extended his scrutiny to the woman, and instantly decided that she must either have been born in France, or have spent several years in Paris. She was perfectly at home in the box, though a number of glasses were turned upon her, and her toilet was remarkably tasteful. She must have been extremely beautiful in former years ; but of her early charms she only retained her regular features, a regal presence and superb shoulders which she freely displayed. Her face was a work of art due to the skilful use of cosmetics of all the colours of the rainbow ; but the effect was tolerably fair from a distance, and the dark-complexioned young man who accompanied her did not seem to object to her paint and powder, for he often leaned over to whisper in her ear. He occupied a seat behind her, and frequently indulged in confidential remarks which did not at all appear to disturb the elderly man, who was devoting his attention to a pretty soubrette, frisking about the stage.

"What a singular trio !" André said to himself. "I can't understand what these persons have in common with Monsieur Vernelle, and, above all, with his daughter, who certainly turned pale on perceiving them. How can she know this superannuated coquette ? Clémence has but just entered society, and that stout lady must have shone in it before Clémence was born. I must certainly be on the wrong track ; these people can't have driven Mademoiselle Vernelle and her father from the theatre. They may have seen a Medusa's head somewhere, but not in that box ; and as I am but little acquainted with their affairs, I will abandon the attempt to find out the truth."

Moreover, there were other matters on his mind ; Babiole had marred his joy by her inopportune greeting. He felt that a vague distrust had stolen into Clémence's heart, and he was a trifle angry with the pretty milliner for having bowed to him so familiarly. Love is selfish, and Subligny began to ask himself if it would not be wrong for him to trouble his promised wife's peace of mind for the sake of defending the possible virtue of a girl for whom he merely felt friendship and gratitude. He glanced at her, and saw that her undivided attention was now given to the opera. She seemed to be absorbed in listening to a delightful melody. Just then, they were singing the famous air :

"Les rendezvous de noble compagnie
Se donnent tous en ce charmant séjour,"

and certainly the words did not remind her of the corpulent speculator who was waiting to invite her to sup with him at the Café du Helder. The heat was oppressing André, who, moreover, realized the necessity of having time for reflection before deciding whether he should constitute himself Babiole's champion or not. So he left the box, and entered the public lounge to get a breath of air, expecting there would be no one there before the close of the act. But it was decreed that he should encounter surprise after surprise that evening, for he had scarcely set foot in the lounge than he found himself face to face with M. Bertaud. He tried to avoid him, but the broker came forward and said: "What! is this you, young man? I did not expect to see you at the Opéra Comique this evening. What the devil brought you here?"

"The same that brought you, probably," replied Subigny, drily. "I came to hear the 'Pré-aux-Clercs.'"

"I didn't, and it seems to me that you yourself are not listening to it just now. I was in the house for a moment, but did not see you. Where is your seat?"

André was strongly tempted to reply, "What business is it of yours?" but he concluded that it would not be advisable to quarrel openly with a man whose business interests were so closely connected with those of Clémence's father, so he merely answered: "Monsieur Vernelle had the kindness to offer me a seat in his box."

"Vernelle!" exclaimed the broker. "Is Vernelle at the theatre this evening? He must have lost his senses. Is he still here?"

"No, he just left in company with Mademoiselle Clémence."

"So he brought his daughter! That certainly caps the climax!"

"You would oblige me very much, sir, if you would explain your meaning more clearly," said André, impatiently. "Your astonishment seems quite uncalled for."

"Explain! oh, certainly. Know, then, young man, that Vernelle made a tremendous mistake in coming here this evening—a mistake which he now bitterly regrets I assure you."

"And why, if you please?"

"For two reasons. The first, you know only too well. The second is that Madame Vernelle, his wife, is enthroned in one of the boxes, escorted by her protector, and a fellow she favours in secret."

Had a thunderbolt fallen at André's feet, it could not have filled him with greater consternation than this response. He understood at last. M. Chantepie had contented himself with saying that Madame Vernelle had left her husband. Bertaud now openly asserted that she had sunk to the lowest possible level; and everything seemed to indicate that he did not exaggerate the facts. André now realised why Clémence had been so anxious to escape from the sight of her degraded mother. So this was the family skeleton, the stain to which he was probably indebted for a favourable answer to his suit. The millionaire accepted his secretary for a son-in-law because he could find no other.

"I am not surprised that Vernelle left," sneered Bertaud. "A man may, indeed, be a philosophical husband, and yet not like to meet his wife under such circumstances. It serves Vernelle right, though. This will teach him to hire opera boxes on a day like this!"

André did not notice this last remark. He could only think of the ruin that had just overtaken his hopes.

"What is the matter with you?" inquired Bertaud. "One would think

that a brickbat had fallen on your head and stunned you. Your employer has stood it for ten years, as every one knows, and he must be used to it by this time. What difference does it make to you, if Vernelle is the laughing stock of all Paris? Ah! if we were talking about his financial embarrassment, I should understand your perturbation, for you must naturally feel anxious as to whether you will retain your situation."

"I can hardly think of self when my benefactor has just been so cruelly wounded," replied André, drily; "and you certainly might have told me about his wife a little less plainly."

"Is it possible that you were ignorant of the matter? Why, Vernelle's domestic misfortunes are known to everybody in Paris. I don't think he cares much about them himself; but it will be a difficult task for him to marry off his daughter, now, especially. His faithless spouse must be pretty bold to return to France. While she was disporting herself in foreign countries, no one thought much about the matter; and in fact, it was almost forgotten. But I was talking just now with a broker I know, who told me that the old hussy was about to take up her abode in the Champs Elysées, at the expense of that old nobleman who is sitting in the box beside her. The other man is a fellow she picked up at Monaco. I don't know what Vernelle will do to stop this scandal: but it must be admitted that the poor fellow has had hard luck for some time past."

Each word uttered by Bertaud stabbed André to the heart. It seemed to him that the speculator took a malicious pleasure in tormenting him; and, moreover, he indulged in sundry covert allusions, which began to excite the young secretary's anxiety. "To be ridiculed and ruined, both at the same time, is certainly too hard," continued the broker.

"Ruined!" exclaimed Subigny. "What do you say?"

"I am only saying what everybody knows. Vernelle has been buying heavily of late and at very high prices. He had already met with enormous losses; and to-night, at the close of the Bourse, there was a further fall of two francs. He has also lost heavily by a failure at Marseilles. You can draw your own conclusions, my dear fellow."

"Excuse me, sir," replied André, greatly excited. "Monsieur Vernelle sold out in time, as you must know better than any one else."

"This is the first news I have of it."

"You forget that Monsieur Vernelle gave you orders to sell twice as much as he had purchased."

"He did nothing of the kind. It is his own fault, too, for I warned him. But he is as obstinate as a mule; and he refused to listen to me. So much the worse for him!"

"Indeed, sir," began André, angrily, "Monsieur Vernelle just told me the contrary of what you assert. One of you must have lied to me, and it certainly wasn't he."

"You will soon find out that it wasn't I. I myself did exactly what he refused to do, and have cleared quite a handsome amount by the operation, while he may think himself lucky if he is able to pay up on settling day, at the end of the month. If he does, it will take all he possesses in the world."

"Thanks to the treachery of which he has been the victim."

"What treachery? Do you mean to insinuate that I received an order to sell, and that I didn't execute it?"

"You read my thoughts perfectly."

"Young man, are you aware that you are making a serious charge against me?"

"Perfectly well aware of it, sir."

"You will at least be compelled to prove it."

"Do you dare to assert that you have acted in an honest and honourable manner in protecting your own interests and neglecting those of your partner?"

"Vernelle is not my partner, though he invested a certain amount of money in my business, it is true. He consequently has an interest in it, and he will have his share of my profits from this day's transactions; but the stock with which he so foolishly burdened himself was purchased in his own name, and for his own benefit. I don't play for such high stakes, and I watch over my interests myself. If Vernelle is ruined, he owes it to his unpardonable carelessness. Here is a banker who has been in business for thirty years, and who has an immense amount of money at stake, and yet he does not even take the trouble to ascertain if an order of vital importance has been received by his agent, or even to come to the Bourse on the day his fate is to be decided. You must confess that this is, at least, very strange."

"I am not criticising Monsieur Vernelle's conduct, but yours; and I don't hesitate to declare that it has been dastardly in the extreme. You knew that he was very much occupied, and that the fall was likely to continue, and yet you didn't take the trouble to consult your best customer before the Bourse closed."

"I did consult him yesterday. I even begged him to sell, but he wouldn't listen to me. Perhaps he thought better of it during the night; but it was his place to come and see me."

"And after the Bourse closed you didn't inform him of the loss he had sustained?"

"I sent him a report as usual; he will find it on his return home. He would have received it much earlier, if the unfortunate idea of coming to the Opéra Comique hadn't occurred to him. He chose a strange time to take his daughter to the theatre."

"But you are here!"

"It is very different with me, young man. I have made a deal of money to-day, and I certainly have a right to enjoy myself, and I can't see why I should deprive myself of a little innocent amusement merely because old Vernelle has been unfortunate in some of his speculations."

"Very well; I have no desire to interfere with your amusement; but we will see what Monsieur Vernelle thinks of your conduct."

"He can think whatever he likes. It makes no difference to me; I have been perfectly square in all my dealings with him. And now I have one word of advice to give you. You are young, and too enthusiastic. You will learn, to your cost, that it is not advisable to espouse other people's interests too warmly. Vernelle is overboard, and you yourself had better try to save yourself from drowning. Still, you are, of course, at perfect liberty to do as you please." As Bertaud concluded, he turned on his heels and left the lounge.

André felt a wild desire to kick him out of the theatre, but the grief that oppressed his heart overcame his anger, and he allowed the scoundrel to depart without the chastisement he deserved. What was André to do now? Give up Clémence, retire from the field? No; M. Vernelle's financial ruin would not deter him from marrying her. But how were the father and daughter to be delivered from Madame Vernelle. If he did not succeed in freeing them of her, how could he marry Clémence? What

would his mother say when she learned the disgrace that tainted his bride's parentage. And she could not fail to learn this sooner or later, for, according to the law, Clémence must have the consent of this woman who had brought her into the world, but who was so utterly unlike her. Madame Subligny undoubtedly imagined that the banker was a widower, as she had never spoken to her son about any Madame Vernelle. What a blow it would be to her when she learned the truth! These harrowing thoughts reduced André to despair. Indeed, he began to fear that he was going mad; and anxious to leave this lounge where his happiness had received its death-blow, he returned to the box just as the act was concluding. He would have found it difficult to explain what impelled him to return to the place where he had sat only a few moments before beside the girl he loved; but it was probably the same instinct that makes the wretched revisit the places where they have suffered. The party in the opposite box was still there. Babiole was chatting with her companion, but she must have suddenly become conscious of André's presence, for she turned and glanced up at him. But instead of smiling, as she had done the first time, she made a gesture that seemed to signify: "I wish to speak to you. Wait for me at the door of the theatre."

André was quite willing to comply with this request. In the first place, there was no longer any reason for practising reserve, as Mademoiselle Vernelle had gone off, and in the second place, he was delighted to find an opportunity of making himself obnoxious to M. Bertaud, for he suspected that Babiole's chaperone had said something about taking supper with the gentleman who had presented the bouquet, and that the girl, determined not to accept the invitation, wished to make sure of his, André's, protection on leaving the theatre. The young secretary looked round for Bertaud, and soon discerned him in ambush, as it were, in a dark corner, like a wily spider watching for a poor little fly. He even fancied that he detected the broker exchanging signs with the stout woman who accompanied Babiole, and he secretly vowed to defeat her vile plans. He pretended not to see Bertaud, and yielding to the strange fascination that an unpleasant sight always exercises over a nervous man, he gazed at the occupants of the opposite box. The elderly man was dozing, while the younger one was standing in a studied attitude. As for the woman, she was using her opera glass perseveringly, and it was not long before Subligny discovered that it was certainly levelled at himself. Why was she gazing at him so persistently? It was quite impossible that she had seen either her husband or her daughter, for she had scarcely taken her seat when they left the box. Consequently, she could not be studying him on their account. The young fellow who was standing beside her, evidently became annoyed by her persistence, for he bent down to whisper something to her; but she made a gesture of impatience, and persisted in her scrutiny. André, however, turned his back to the box, and giving Babiole a glance which plainly implied, "Rely on me;" he took up the opera-glass forgotten by Clémence, and left the theatre. A moment afterwards he installed himself behind the newspaper-kiosk from which he had witnessed Bertaud's introduction to Babiole. Several itinerant newsvendors now passed by shouting: "Great panic at the Bourse. Latest News from Tonquin!" The latest news from Tonquin had not the slightest interest for André, but the announcement of the panic only aroused his anxiety afresh, and reminded him that M. Vernelle still considered himself rich. What a blow the truth would prove on the morrow! As André thought of it he was vaguely

tempted to strangle the traitor Bertaud, who, he felt-certain, had betrayed his partner.

When the spectators began to leave the theatre, André stationed himself at the corner of the Rue Marivaux, so that Babiole could not pass by without seeing him. He had scarcely taken his stand there when he perceived M. Bertaud at the door of the staircase leading to the private rooms of the Café Anglais. Bertaud on his side could see him, but evinced no inclination to cross the street and engage in conversation. Five minutes later Babiole appeared, leaning on the stout woman's arm, and came straight towards André, in spite of the efforts of her companion to get her across the street. André stepped forward to meet her, bowed to her as deferentially as he would have bowed to any fine lady, and quietly said : "I am at your service, mademoiselle."

Babiole instantly relinquished her hold on her companion's arm and took André's, saying, as she did so : "I thank you, madame, for the very pleasant evening I have passed ; but it isn't necessary for you to trouble yourself any further. I am very near home ; besides, this gentleman will have the kindness to see me safely to my own door."

"Why, mademoiselle," exclaimed the matron, "you know very well that we are expected—"

"To take supper with a friend of yours. Yes, madame, but I am not hungry, and I feel sleepy. So pray allow me to wish you good-night—and a good appetite," added the girl, mischievously.

Bertaud had hastened up to listen to the conversation. He had come with the very evident intention of interfering, and Subigny was preparing to snub him effectually, when Babiole turned to the broker, and said : "Good evening, sir. I regret that you should have been put to so much unnecessary trouble."

While speaking, she dragged André away before he had time to open his lips. Nevertheless, he heard the broker mutter an oath together with an opprobrious epithet, which was evidently applied to him. Quite enraged, Subigny tried to free himself from his companion, but Babiole clung tightly to his arm, and whispered : "No quarrel on my account, I entreat you."

After hastily crossing the boulevard, amid vehicles proceeding in every direction, the two young people reached the Rue Laffitte. "I arrived just in time," remarked André, not exactly knowing what to say.

"I am not afraid while you are with me," replied Babiole. "Still I should have managed to get out of the scrape very well without assistance. I am in the habit of protecting myself."

"Who was that woman with you?"

"Madame Divet, my employer. She will be very angry ; but it makes no difference to me. Had she given me any hint that she intended to take supper with that old wretch after the performance, I wouldn't have gone to the theatre with her."

"Then you were not acquainted with that gentleman?"

"I have seen him at the shop. He calls there very often ; but if I had known that he was in league with my employer—"

"Will you allow me to advise you to change your place of employment?"

"I am strongly thinking of doing so, but it isn't a very easy matter. I receive very good pay at Madame Divet's, and I'm not at all sure of finding as good a place anywhere else. Besides, I haven't had any real cause to complain of her as yet. Still I should not hesitate to leave her if I really thought that she had any bad designs. But enough on this subject. Will

you tell me what you have been doing with yourself for the past month? You promised to come and see me, you remember?"

"I have been to the Rue Lamartine several times; but was never fortunate enough to find you at home."

"Oh, you came once to get your trunk. You have made a fortune, it seems. I noticed you in one of the swell boxes, with very brilliant company."

"I have obtained a situation in the office of the gentleman you saw me with at the theatre. He is a banker, and—"

"And he has a very charming daughter. I congratulate you."

Anxious to change the subject, André hastily inquired: "And what have *you* been doing since I saw you, mademoiselle?"

"Oh, I have had one trouble after another. In the first place my uncle is quite ill. While out collecting, he took a severe cold, and yesterday he went to the hospital, where he can be better cared for than at home. Tomorrow is Sunday, visiting-day, and I am going to see him. Then, too, I missed you very much after you went away. I hadn't known you long, it is true, but I very quickly become attached to people I like. I hope you no longer think of killing yourself?"

"No, mademoiselle, but I have not forgotten that you saved my life."

"It was all due to chance. If I hadn't had a bonnet to finish that night, I should have gone to bed at nine o'clock; then Heaven only knows what would have happened. Your friend Monsieur Marbeuf was less fortunate. It seems that he is dead. The doorkeeper told me yesterday that his furniture was to be sold."

"I thank you for informing me of that, but I don't yet despair of finding Marbeuf. I believe that some unforeseen business compelled him to leave Paris suddenly, and that he will soon return."

"I hope so with all my heart. Now I am going to be unpardonably inquisitive. May I venture to ask if you have since seen the gentleman I found with you when I called that morning to inquire how you had spent the night?"

"I see him every day, and, by the way, I recollect you told me that he was a bad man; but—"

"I could say no more at that time, because he was present. I hardly think that he recognized me, but I hope that you did not tell him my name!"

"How could I, when I did not even know it myself?"

"I am glad to hear that, for it is not at all likely that he remembered me. I was only six years old when he used to come to our house. I have changed a good deal since then, but he hasn't altered in the least. He still has the same false, crafty face."

"Why do you dislike him so much?"

"He ruined my father, who blew his brains out six months afterwards. Yes, he urged him to intrust his little fortune to him to speculate with. My poor father lost everything, and this Chantepeie made money by it." André started. It was almost the same story as that of Bertaud's connection with M. Vernelle, and Bertaud and Chantepeie were evidently fast friends. "I don't know what your connection with him may be," continued Babiole, "but it is my duty to tell you, 'Beware of him. He is a scoundrel and a hypocrite.'"

André had already formed a strong opinion of his own respecting the cashier. However, he did not communicate it to Babiole. In fact, it would have taken him too long to explain matters, and they had already

reached the corner of the Rue Lamartine. "I thank you for the warning, and will profit by it," he replied. "May I venture, before leaving you, to ask your permission to call and see you?"

"Whenever you like, providing it isn't to-morrow, for I shall spend the morning at the shop and the afternoon at the hospital with my uncle. By next Sunday he will be well again, I hope, and in that case I shall be at home all day, and shall be very glad to see you. Thank you, here's my door," added the girl, shaking hands with André.

He stood gazing after her for a moment as she entered the house, and then turned sadly towards the Rue Rougemont. He was thinking of the threatening morrow, and it seemed to him that his last hope had departed with Babiole.

V.

It is eight o'clock, and the dull, grey light of a foggy morning steals into a long room bordered with two parallel rows of white-curtained iron bedsteads. The well polished floor shines like a mirror. At one end there is a door and several cupboards; at the other a kind of square compartment provided with water taps and basins; this latter is the dressing-room of the poor. Through the windows, open at the top, the air glides in, freighted with the balmy odours of spring. Several nurses are moving noiselessly about, others are arranging medicine bottles on an *étagère*. It is the Saint Ferdinand ward of the Necker Hospital, which stands at the end of the Rue de Sèvres. The hour for the chief physician's visit is fast approaching, and preparations are being made to receive him. All the patients are in bed, even those who are well able to rise and to walk about, for such is the rule. Clinical studies require this, for the pupils must be grouped round a patient's bed in order to hear their instructor's remarks.

Those who are convalescent are sitting up in bed, and some of them are talking with their neighbours. They bid each other good-morning, and exchange bits of news and even jests, which are always rather coarse, and not unfrequently quite funereal in character. The curtains of one bed are closely drawn, and the patients all know why. Number Ten died last night. In a hospital, as in a prison, you cease to be a man and become a number.

"Well, old Fourteen, how are you this morning?" says one fellow.

"Tolerable, tolerable, Number Twelve. Though I must say I should not object to a good drink at the wine shop."

"You had better not ask for one here. They will give you a pot of herb-tea."

As an accompaniment to these jeering remarks, one can hear the groans of Number Sixteen, who is suffering terribly.

Suddenly two attendants enter, bearing a sort of litter, on which rests a roughly made coffin, which they deposit near the closed bed. "Here comes the domino-box!" exclaim several patients, who will probably soon be laid away to rest in a similar receptacle.

The dead man is ready for the dissecting-room. His toilet had been made the night before by one of the nurses. He is laid in his coffin, and then borne away, while a consumptive, who has not a fortnight to live, huskily calls out: "Passengers for Clamart* all aboard."

* The dissecting establishment annexed to the Paris hospitals is situated at Clamart in the suburbs.—*Trans.*

It is not that these poor creatures are heartless, but they have become accustomed to such sights. In their own homes, if they saw a relative die, they would mourn his loss far more sincerely than do many rich people, who expect a share of the deceased's property. But in the hospital, as on the battle-field, persons must expect to die, and so it is there you must go to learn how little human life is worth. Who of us has not witnessed the last moments of some loved one? Relatives are kneeling about the bed, striving to repress their sobs; despair is depicted on every face. It almost seems to every one that the world is about to end with the departure of the loved one who is still clinging to life. And, when the soul takes flight in a faint sigh, shrieks escape from every lip, and tears flow from every eye. There is nothing of that kind in a hospital, however. Death is only what one must expect in the natural course of things. Death is ever present. It touches a bed, and the bed becomes empty. It will have another occupant to-morrow, however—another occupant who may go off in the same way. But what does that matter to the survivors? They have become familiar with the idea of parting, and quietly await their time, without longing for it, like soldiers who see their comrades falling around them. Their end is usually silent and lonely, for nearly all die without a moan, at night-time, while those around them are asleep. But they, perhaps, depart on their last journey with less regret, for they do not witness the harrowing grief and despair of those they love, and whom they must part from.

The clock strikes nine, and the head physician enters, followed by a crowd of medical students. He has a white apron tied around his waist. The house-doctor and house-chemist walk beside him, note-books in hand, to jot down his directions. The students crowd closely upon their heels, for Dr. Valbrègue's class in clinics is very popular. Some of the young fellows are shabbily dressed, and not a few of them have sunken eyes and haggard faces, for there was a public ball at the Jardin Bullier last night. Profound silence reigns in the ward. The patients know that the physician tolerates no facetious remarks, and they also realise that their lives are in his hands. Dr. Valbrègue pauses at each bedside, questions the patient, or examines him, and explains the case to his followers. He speaks rapidly and lucidly, though he uses technical terms in order that the patient may not hear his death-warrant. He says, for instance: "The tubercles are in a state of ramolence," and the poor man, afflicted with pulmonary consumption, does not understand that these words are a sentence against which there is no appeal. Frequently also, Dr. Valbrègue calls upon one of his pupils to give a diagnosis of the case, and, if the young fellow makes any mistake, gently corrects him; nor does he ever forget, before passing on, to cheer the patient's spirits by a few words of encouragement. His is, in every respect, a model visit.

On the day we refer to, it was less interesting than usual. The ward sheltered such common-place maladies as affections of the chest, intermittent fevers, and so on; but in the beds first visited, there was not a single remarkable case, or uncommon ailment. In fact, the doctor was reserving for the last, the only one worthy of particular attention.

Number Ten had died, as Dr. Valbrègue had predicted the day before; and Number Sixteen was about to die; that was evident to any one. Number Twenty was a new patient; a man about forty years of age, who had been admitted to the hospital the preceding day, upon a ticket bearing the words: "Pleuro-pneumonia." The doctor examined him

carefully, gave a prescription, and then inquired, kindly: "What is your calling, my good fellow?"

"I am now a collector, sir, but I was formerly a quarter-master in the Seventh Cuirassiers."

"And it was in running about to collect money that you caught this cold, I suppose?"

"Yes; I think so."

"Well, you will be out again in a week. There was a mistake in your ticket of admission. You have only a severe attack of bronchitis. But it would be as well for you to change your calling. You have a predisposition to inflammation of the lungs, which will cause you a great deal of trouble if you are not careful."

"I should be very glad to retire, I assure you, but I have no money, and I must earn my living in some way."

"Nonsense! you can earn it as a copyist or book-keeper. I will speak to one of my friends, a banker, about you."

"Thank you, sir. I shall require no urging, I assure you."

Dr. Valbrègue passed on. The ward contained forty beds; the even numbers on one side, the uneven ones on the other. Number Twenty was consequently the last patient of one of the rows, and his bed was directly opposite that of Number Nineteen. The latter was afflicted with a malady of an unusual kind; he was one of those patients who only find shelter in the Paris hospitals for a time, for he looked the picture of health. He was a young and stalwart man, with bright eyes, and a heavy, black, untrimmed beard, which naturally gave him a rather wild air. He was in bed, of course, like the others; but he seemed very anxious to get up, for he was moving restlessly about. "Well," said the doctor, feeling his pulse, "how are you progressing, my dear— Pray tell me your name, I always forget it."

"And I, also, have forgotten it, as you know very well, for that is the reason you keep me here," replied the patient.

"Nothing would give me more pleasure than to sign your ticket of dismissal; but where would you go?"

"True: I have also forgotten where I used to live. But that needn't make any difference. I can't remain in a hospital forever. You had better send me away, doctor. I shall manage very well, I dare say. I didn't live upon air before I came here. I must have earned my living in some way."

"But how?"

"I cannot say. It seems to me, though, that I kept books."

"Yes, you must have been a clerk, I think. But where? In one of the government offices?"

"All I can tell you is that I worked in an office. There are times when I can see the place, it seems to me. There were a lot of green cardboard boxes in it."

"This is a sign of improvement, gentlemen," said the doctor, turning to his pupils.

"It even seems to me that if I could be taken there I might recognize it."

"That is the very difficulty, my friend; if you could only recollect in what part of Paris you lived, I would take you there myself, and it would be very strange if your memory did not return to you when you passed your old home. Come, now, try to remember."

"I don't do anything else. My poor brain is constantly at work trying

to solve the mystery. Occasionally, some chance word awakens a vague recollection. I strive to seize hold of it, but then it fades away, almost instantly. I am like a man lost in a mine, and endeavouring to grope his way out amid the darkness."

"And you have no recollection of the past?" inquired the doctor.

"No. It seems to me, now, that my life began when I regained consciousness here on this bed. And yet, I'm not insane, for I realize my condition perfectly, and even the condition of those around me. I know that I was brought to the Necker hospital in a state of complete insensibility, and that I had been picked up on the Boulevard des Invalides. I know that you are a celebrated physician, and that a man died here in the ward last night. More than that, I have followed and understood all the theories you have advanced in the presence of these gentlemen, with regard to my malady. I know that I fell, and that in my fall that part of my brain in which the faculty of memory is located received a shock from which it has not recovered."

"And how about all the rest?"

"I know nothing whatever about that. I don't even know who or what I was before the accident."

The students were all attention; never before had they had acquaintance with such a puzzling case. Dr. Valbrègue keenly watched his patient and vainly tried to devise some plan which would connect the past with the present, the known with the unknown, and dispel the darkness shrouding this unfortunate young man's mind. "You express yourself so well that you must have received a good education," the doctor remarked at last.

"That is very probable," was the reply.

"At what school or college were you educated?"

"I don't remember."

"Have you forgotten your parents and relatives? Don't you recollect anything of your childhood?"

"Nothing whatever."

The doctor paused, realizing that these questions were futile. "And your sweetheart," he suddenly asked, "don't you regret her?"

"I never had one."

"Are you sure?"

"At least, I have no remembrance of having had one."

"And yet you know what a sweetheart is?"

"Certainly. Last Thursday a very pretty woman came to see Number Ten, the patient who died last night, and I really enjoyed looking at her."

"But you didn't know her, I suppose?"

"No, not at all."

"Do you think that if you had ever seen her before you would have recognized her?"

"I think so; but I'm not sure."

"That would be a good experiment, and chance may furnish you with the opportunity. Do you remain in the ward on visiting days?"

"Not always. I walk in the garden as often as I can. The open air does me good."

"Yes, I understand that; but try to be here at the hours when visitors are admitted."

"I won't fail to do so, of course, if you wish it, sir."

"It is for your own sake entirely that I make the request. Some one

may come here who will recognize you, and speak to you ; and even that may be enough to bring your past back to you, and restore your memory. Then you can leave the hospital where you find it rather dull, I fear."

"Yes ; I am positively dying of ennui and mortification."

"Well, you can then re-enter social life, where I feel sure that you occupied an honourable position, and regain your lost identity."

"That is what I long for above everything else, and if it doesn't happen I don't know what will become of me. You will perhaps finish by sending me to a mad-house. I am not a lunatic now, but I might become one."

"I promise you to do all in my power to prevent that. I will even try to find a situation for you if you desire it. You haven't forgotten how to read and write, so that you could be employed. Besides, it might be the most effectual way of restoring your memory."

"I should be very glad to try and work."

"Then I will see what I can do for you ; but I should like you to remain here a fortnight longer. You will be the gainer, and science will also profit by it."

"Yes, I know that my case will figure in the medical annals, and that you will report it to the Academy. It is an honour that I don't at all care about, but you are so kind to me that I will do whatever you wish."

"It is settled, then. Trust me and have a little patience. Quiet, moderate exercise, and a substantial diet—but above all, quiet, that's what you need now. Don't rack your brain in the hope of reviving your memory. Wait for some incident to do that for you."

With these concluding words, the doctor left the bedside, and finished his round. When all the patients had been examined, Dr. Valbrègue laid aside his apron in the ante-room and turned to the crowd of students around him, saying :

"You have just seen, gentlemen, a case unparalleled in the annals of science. The loss of memory in consequence of a fall, or of a blow, has been frequently observed ; but one of two things usually happens : either the lost faculty gradually returns after a short delay, or, on the contrary, in the same space of time, intelligence becomes totally extinct, and the injured person remains an idiot. Now, with the patient we have just been examining, the case is very different. Thirty-three days after his accident, he is still in the same condition. The malady is stationary. The injury done to the brain was only partial at the outset, and partial it remains. It will be very interesting to know the result of this extraordinary case ; and I need not add that I do not intend to lose sight of the patient after he leaves the hospital."

"If any one of you has any remarks to offer I will listen to them with pleasure," added the doctor, after a pause.

"I have one," said one of the students, timidly.

"Speak, my friend."

"I should like to ask if this case does not strongly resemble one of pretended madness."

"That is not a bad suggestion for a student in his first year. You mean that this man has retained his memory, and that he merely pretends to have lost it. Upon what do you found your opinion, may I ask ?"

"It seems to me that this man may have some object in concealing his identity. He was probably wounded in some brawl, for when he was brought here his clothes were torn and stained with mud. It is possible that he killed or wounded some one seriously, before his fall. Who knows,

indeed, but he may have fallen in scaling some wall, with the intention of committing robbery or murder."

"You have read Gaboriau's novels, I see, young man," replied Dr. Valbrègue, smiling. "Your conjecture is ingenious, but it is not based on scientific observation. Besides, I can set your mind at rest on this point. At first, I was under the same impression as yourself—and so, indeed, were others—but I investigated the matter, making inquiries at the prefecture of police. I found that nothing whatever was known there about our patient, and that on the night of his accident there was no street fight, and not even an attempt at robbery reported to the authorities; so, it is only reasonable to conclude that he speaks the truth when he declares that he remembers nothing. You will see that the future will confirm my diagnosis, for I feel sure that my patient will be recognized sooner or later. Now good-bye until to-morrow, gentlemen."

The crowd that had gathered round the doctor hastily dispersed; the students moving away in little groups, busily engaged in discussing their professor's views on this interesting subject.

Meanwhile the physician repaired to his carriage, escorted by the house doctor and house chemist. The latter seemed to give all his thoughts to his work. His hair was dishevelled and his clothing shabby, while his hands bore marks of the chemical experiments to which he zealously devoted himself. The house doctor, on his side, was a short, dark-complexioned man, much neater in appearance than his companion, and endowed with an intelligent and prepossessing face. "What do you think of the case, my dear Bosc?" Dr. Valbrègue asked him. "Have you any hope that we shall eventually solve the enigma?"

"Balzac indicates a mode of cure which seems an excellent one to me," was the smiling response.

"Balzac! So you, also, study novels with a view to curing the sick?"

"Well, he tells the story of a woman who had become mad, when our troops crossed the Beresina in 1812, and when her husband perished before her very eyes. Twenty years afterwards, some one conceived the idea of representing in her presence the catastrophe which had caused the loss of her reason, with the adjuncts of a simulated river and ice."

"And on witnessing the sight, she suddenly recovered her reason. That would answer admirably on the stage; but, in the first place, our man is not mad, and secondly, I should like to know how you would manage to show him the scene of his accident. He, himself, has no idea what happened to him, or where it happened."

"But he will recollect, perhaps—and then, by taking him to the place where he was found—"

"In the meantime, my dear fellow, you had better reperuse some of the numerous works on diseases of the brain. They are the best authorities, after all. And as you are on duty to-day, Sunday, do me the favour to go up to the ward while the visitors are there. Watch them without appearing to do so, and devise some way of calling Number Nineteen's attention to them; if you should detect any sign of a revival of his memory, pray do your best to awaken it thoroughly."

"Very well, sir, I will do so."

As they were crossing the courtyard, Dr. Valbrègue turned to the house chemist, and said:

"I was almost forgetting to give you this little packet, my dear Hous-sais. It contains a bromide power which I prescribed for one of my

patients. It disagrees with him strangely. Whenever he takes any of it, he complains of a terrible contraction of the muscles of the throat, and spasms of the jaw."

"Those are the usual effects of strychnine."

"I know it; and for that very reason I want you to analyse the compound. Do me the favour to hand me, in writing, to-morrow morning, the result of your analysis."

"It will be ready for you to-day. I am going to the laboratory now."

"If you don't use the entire powder, you had better send me what you have left, in case it should be necessary to have another analysis," remarked the doctor.

With this final recommendation, Dr. Valbrègue took leave of the two young men, who hastened to the guard-room, to have a smoke before breakfast, and, while they were inhaling the fragrant weed, the existence of the patients resumed its wonted course.

All days are very much alike in a hospital. Still, on Sundays, the inmates tidy themselves as much as possible to receive their friends—at least, those that have any, and, to the credit of the Parisians, it must be said, that such is the case with the great majority of the invalids. As Béranger says, the poor are not happy, but as a celebrated refrain expresses it: "They love one another." Number Nineteen was not favoured, however. No one had called to see him, since he had been an inmate of the hospital; but this was probably due to the fact that his former acquaintances did not know his whereabouts.

After eating the cutlet brought him for his breakfast, he went down into the garden as usual. He was in the habit of spending most of his time there, smoking a brier-wood pipe he had purchased, out of the sixty francs found in his pocket when he entered the hospital.

All the convalescents lingered in the garden from morning until night. Some walked up and down the paths, others sat on the benches and read. But Number Nineteen did not associate with any of them, not because their education was inferior to his own, but because he did not know what to say to them. What can a man talk about when he has no recollection of the past, when he has entirely forgotten his former avocation, and even who he is? The patients who frequented the garden were nearly all of them working-men, who discussed the matters that interested them most: salaries, employers' faults and foremen's brutality; the condition of the wife and family at home, now that the bread-winner was laid up, and so on. These fellows did not seek Number Nineteen's society, although he showed no disposition to put on airs, as they expressed it, for he always answered civilly when he was spoken to, and he never refused tobacco to those who asked him for any. But his face did not suit their fancy, and his case, curious as it was, interested them but slightly, as they did not understand it. Indeed, many of them did not believe in it. They did not, like Dr. Valbrègue's student, imagine that Number Nineteen was a criminal, striving to conceal his identity; they rather fancied he was a detective, disguised as a patient, in order to play the spy at his ease. To play the spy upon whom? might be asked. They did not specify any particular person; they could not. But the natural result of all this was that the poor fellow was almost always alone.

That Sunday afternoon, the whole hospital was crowded with visitors—worthy people who had taken advantage of this opportunity to bring such friends or relatives as they had among the invalids, consolation and food, more

especially food—on account of the general and very erroneous impression, that the department of public charities starves the sick confided to its care. The Saint Ferdinand ward was crowded with new comers. Out of the forty beds, there were but six that were not surrounded by visitors. There were wives, and mothers, and children without number, but not nearly as many men. Not that men have not equally kind hearts, but the wine-shops sometimes stop them on the way. Everyone present had his or her hands full. Certain gifts are not prohibited, such as jam, tobacco, and flowers—provided there are not too many of them, and their perfume is not too strong—and there was quite a display of gifts upon the pedestals and on the shelves over the head of each bed.

The attendants were polite, as they are looking forward to the weekly gratuity brought by the relatives, and the whole ward wore a gala air. Death, however, was close at hand, on that day, as on every other, and there was weeping, but the mourners covered their faces with their handkerchiefs.

Number Twenty, who occupied the last bed on the row to the right, was alone; but he evidently expected some one, for he had combed his hair carefully, and was now sitting up leaning against his pillows. Suddenly a young girl appeared on the threshold of the ward, and after hesitating a moment, walked with an uncertain step up the room, between the two rows of little white beds. It was easy to see that this was her first visit to the hospital, and that she did not know exactly where to look for the friend she was seeking, for she glanced at the numbers of the beds as she passed along. A woman, who was still young, and who was miserably clad, had entered the ward at almost the same moment and walked along beside her. This latter person knew very well where she wished to go, however; but the further she advanced, the paler she grew. Suddenly she paused a few steps from bed Number Ten. It had been freshly made and it was empty. The woman gazed fixedly at the white sheets and curtains, but she dared advance no further. As an attendant passed, she gave him a questioning look, and he replied in subdued tones: "Last night at three o'clock." She made no rejoinder, but tottered as if about to fall, and two big tears rolled down her cheeks.

The young girl beside her understood, and her heart sunk; but almost immediately she caught sight of Number Twenty, and hastened to him. "So here you are, little one!" he exclaimed, kissing her affectionately. "I was sure that I should see you to-day; but I am none the less grateful to you for coming. It shows that you haven't forgotten your Uncle Auguste."

"Forget you! the only friend I have left in the world now that mother is dead. Yesterday, when I received your letter, I wanted to go and see you at once, but Madame Divet told me I should be refused admission; and as you said in your letter that your illness was not serious—"

"It is nothing at all, my little Babiole. The doctor promised me this morning that I should be out in a week. I had a very comfortable night, too, but yesterday I thought I was in a very bad way."

"But why didn't you remain at home instead of shutting yourself up in this horrid hospital? I would have come and nursed you."

"You had something else to do; besides, my room is too small, and an old trooper like myself isn't afraid of a hospital. But tell me some news. How is Madame Divet? And when are you to be promoted to the position of forewoman?"

"Never, perhaps. I am by no means sure that I shall remain any longer in the shop."

"Why?" asked Uncle Auguste, frowning. "Do you want to go to the bad?"

"It is precisely because I don't want to go to the bad that I think of leaving Madame Divet."

"What!" exclaimed Uncle Auguste, "has that old fatty been giving you bad advice?"

"Worse than that. She had two tickets for the Opéra Comique yesterday, and she invited me to go with her. I ought to have refused, but she urged me so strongly that I finally consented, and I was well punished for it. Would you believe it, the seats were given her by a gentleman who was waiting for us outside when we left the theatre so as to take us to sup with him."

"Did you go?"

"Not I. In the first place I don't sup with gentlemen, and even if I wanted to I wouldn't have supped with that one. He was too old, too ugly and too common-looking. Madame Divet told me he was a rich broker, but he looked more like a butcher. At all events I wished my employer good night and left her. How she must have fumed, and the man too!"

"You did quite right, Babiole; and you will do still better to leave her. I'll find you another place as soon as I leave the hospital, and I'll tell the old wretch what I think of her, too. You see it isn't safe to trust to appearances. And to think that I chose the place for you! But you shan't remain there a day longer. I don't intend my poor sister's daughter to be exposed to dangers of that kind. If you go astray, child, you will be the first in our family to do so."

"There is no danger, uncle, and I promise you—"

Babiole suddenly paused. She had just become aware that a young man with a white apron was gazing at her with annoying persistency. It was Bosc, making the round prescribed by his superior. Having unexpectedly discovered a pretty girl, he was feasting his eyes upon her; but as she immediately turned her back on him, he vented his ill-humour upon a nurse who happened to be passing at the time. "Why isn't Number Nineteen here?" he inquired, angrily.

"He is in the garden," stammered the attendant.

"Fetch him at once, and don't let him leave the ward again until after visiting hours."

The attendant sulkily obeyed, and Bosc walked away, not without turning more than once to catch another glimpse of the pretty girl who had attracted his attention; but as she obstinately declined to look at him, he went to announce his discovery to some of his comrades, resolving to return and take another glance before the departure of the visitors. "Is that young man the doctor?" inquired Babiole.

"Well, he is a doctor, but not the head one, he's a sort of assistant."

"Are patients forbidden to walk in the garden?"

"No, certainly not. Number Nineteen was sent for at the especial request of the head-physician."

"Number Nineteen?"

"Yes; the patient who occupies the bed opposite mine. I am Number Twenty. A man isn't known by his name here; besides, this fellow hasn't any name."

"No name? Impossible!"

"It is exactly as I tell you. Look at his card. It bears the date of his admission and the name of his malady ; but the place where the name and profession are usually given is left empty, while upon mine you can read in large letters, Auguste Brochard, collector."

"But how can this unfortunate man have forgotten his name—for I suppose he has forgotten it?"

"It is a strange story. It seems that he fell and injured his head, and a total loss of memory followed. This morning the doctor talked to him for ten minutes or more, and I heard all he said. He may be a very learned man ; but in my opinion, this patient is fooling him completely. He pretends to remember nothing, but he is no more mad than I am. He is only pretending."

"But what can be his object?"

"Probably to conceal some crime he committed before coming here. I have an idea that he is some defaulting cashier who has taken refuge here, while the police are hunting for him in Belgium or America. I don't know him, but it seems to me I have seen him somewhere or other."

"Haven't you tried to talk with him?"

"Not yet. I only came yesterday ; besides, I take no interest in his affairs. I'm not working for the police."

"You are quite right. I'm sure that I could never make up my mind to denounce any one—not even a thief."

"Besides, rich people don't deserve much consideration. They are so mean and unscrupulous. Do you remember that scoundrel Chantepie who ruined your father?"

"Oh, yes, for I saw him only a short time ago."

"And I hope you turned your back on him. After his rascality of ten years ago, we thought he would go abroad. But he did nothing of the kind it seems. He is now in a very respectable banking-house—Vernelle's in the Rue Bergère, and the strangest thing of it all is that he is cashier there. I went there the other day to collect a note, and he paid me."

"Did he recognise you?"

"No, I think not ; at least, he said nothing to me ; but I longed to pummel him and then go and warn Vernelle that his safe was in very unsafe hands. On reflection, however, I decided to keep quiet. There was no chance of Chantepie's repaying the money he stole from your father, for, even at the time, we were unable to prove that he had put it in his pocket instead of losing it at the Bourse, as he pretended. Besides, Vernelle is nothing to me. He has misplaced his confidence, and he must suffer for it. I heard only the day before yesterday at the Bank that he had lost heavily at the Bourse ; so much the worse for him."

"Poor man ! It was doubtless that wretch Chantepie who urged him to speculate—just as he urged my poor father—and he has probably enriched himself at his employer's expense. He, also, has a daughter, perhaps—this Monsieur Vernelle, I mean—"

"Yes, he has ; but she will never know want, for Vernelle is very wealthy. The loss of two or three millions won't prevent his daughter from making a brilliant match, while you, Babiole, are reduced to work for an old hussy who is trying to make money out of your beauty. Ah ! won't I give her a piece of my mind when I get out of this place !"

"I assure you that it would not be worth while, uncle, as I shall not return to her. You will find me another place ; and in the meantime, you need feel no anxiety about me. I have a little money laid by."

"Yes, I know that you are very prudent ; but in some other shop it will be just the same. You are very pretty, and as sure to attract men as a candle attracts moths."

"Ah, well, moths generally come to grief in the candle," was Babiole's laughing response.

"Yes ; but a girl like you can't intend to remain an old maid."

"Oh, I have plenty of time to consider that subject, for a girl can't be called an old maid before she is twenty-five, and I was only sixteen last September."

"Well, yes, you are still rather too young ; but all the same, I should be delighted to take you to the mayor's office if I knew any worthy young man who wanted you. But perhaps you are ambitious, and unwilling to marry a mere clerk."

"Certainly not, if I loved him. I am not foolish enough to imagine that an ambassador will ask for my hand."

"Some ambassadors have been known to marry women much inferior to you in every respect. But if any swell should ask me for you, I should refuse him flatly. I know these men. They would desert you in less than six months. What I should prefer for you, is a young fellow, not rich, but capable of becoming so by reason of industry and steady habits."

"That would suit me, provided he was kind, well-bred, and not too ugly."

"Of course. Well, such a person can be found perhaps. I will have a look for one."

"Yes, uncle, look for one," said Babiole. "I shall not attempt it. I am too much afraid of making a mistake."

"You are right. At your age, it is difficult to distinguish the counterfeit from the genuine article ; and providing the coin shines, one does not think of testing it. So it is settled. You are to remain quietly at home until I leave here. But how will you pass the time away ?"

"Oh, you need have no fears. I never feel bored. I have my rooms to take care of ; my birds must be fed, and I sing and read—"

"Novels, I suppose. That is a pity. They are sure to turn young girl's heads sooner or later."

"I don't care much for novels. I read plays."

"They are no better. By the way, are you on neighbourly terms with any of the other tenants in the house ?"

"I have no neighbour, now."

"What ! are you all alone on the fourth floor ?"

"The rooms opposite mine were occupied by a gentleman, who went out one evening and nothing has been seen or heard of him since. No one knows what has become of him. It is strange, isn't it ? But it is all true. His furniture is to be sold, the doorkeeper tells me ; and the rooms are to let. It is no great loss to me, however. I used to meet him occasionally on the stairs ; but I never spoke to him, and I don't believe he could tell whether I was young or old, for he never even looked at me."

"What did he do ?"

"He was employed in a mercantile house in the Rue du Sentier, I believe."

"He was probably sent to collect some money and made off with it."

"That's possible, though he was an honest, steady-looking young man."

"So was Chantepie, but that didn't prevent him from being a scoundrel."

"They are not unlike in appearance, and yet, I don't think my neighbour

was a thief. I made some inquiries about him of his most intimate friend, and he told me that Monsieur Marbeuf had been obliged to leave Paris suddenly on account of very urgent business."

"So you are acquainted with his friends?"

"With one of them, though I have only met him twice, once at home, and once at the theatre."

"I advise you to have nothing more to do with him. The intimate friend of a runaway clerk cannot be a very desirable acquaintance."

Babiole was about to tell her uncle the service Subigny had rendered her on the evening before, but this remark caused her to abstain, from fear of being scolded. "I was almost forgetting that I brought you some chocolate," she said, depositing a little package on the table. "They wanted to take it from me at the door, but I begged so hard they finally consented."

"Thanks, little one," said Uncle Auguste, affectionately. "I shall enjoy eating it very much when the doctor allows it. Just now I am dieted. He says, too, that I mustn't talk too much."

"Do you mean that I must now go away?"

"Oh, no; remain as long as you can, and talk as much as you like. I must not answer you, but I can listen to you, and that will console me. Ah, here comes the house doctor again. He wants to make eyes at you again, I suppose. He had better not carry things too far. If he does, I shall treat him as he deserves."

Bosc was, in fact, returning, in company with Number Nineteen whom he had met on the staircase. He was talking with him, and making fun of the visitors, in order to draw the strange patient's attention to them, and see if he recognised any of them.

"Good Heaven!" murmured Babiole, as soon as she perceived the patient.

"I cannot be mistaken—that gentleman with the beard—"

"Ah, yes! he's the patient who has forgotten his name or won't tell it."

"Well, he's certainly Monsieur Marbeuf, my former neighbour, and though he has greatly changed, and is much thinner, I'm sure it's he."

"We'll find out. I have only to call the house doctor and ask him—"

"Oh, no. Pray don't. You said, only a moment ago, that nothing could induce you to denounce any one."

"But that wouldn't be denouncing him."

"It would be equivalent, as you think he has committed some crime and is desirous of concealing his name."

"I may be mistaken. Besides, he will be sure to recognise you."

"If he does recognise me, and speaks to me, that will be sufficient proof that he has no reason to reproach himself. In that case, I shall answer him, and remind him that we were neighbours in the Rue Lamartine. But otherwise, I shall be silent. I have no desire to injure him. It would bring us bad luck."

"You are right, child, I would much rather that you did not mix yourself up in the affair. You would perhaps be obliged to go before a commissary of police and explain matters. Besides, the man has never injured us, and I don't see why we should betray him."

Babiole did not abstain from revealing Marbeuf's name, solely because she disliked doing him an injury. She also remembered that André was his intimate friend, and she recollected the night when André had been bent on killing himself because Marbeuf had not returned. At this thought she came to the conclusion that Marbeuf must either have taken his friend's money away with him, or have induced André to engage in some compro-

missing enterprise, and have then fled, leaving him to face the storm. Still, André must have forgiven him, as only the evening before he had told Babiole that business had compelled Marbeuf to leave Paris very unexpectedly; hence Babiole was obliged to keep silent under penalty of offending André, or even injuring him. As by other arguments she had prevailed upon her uncle also, to hold his peace, there was a strong probability that Number Nineteen would remain what he was—a nameless patient, a living mystery—to the great chagrin of the physician who had undertaken to cure him—that is, unless he recognised Babiole, which was scarcely probable, since he had scarcely looked at her in the Rue Lamartine.

He advanced slowly, escorted by the house doctor who was watching the young girl, and who did not fail to call Marbeuf's attention to her by a gentle nudge. Marbeuf glanced at her, and seemed pleased to look at her; but he displayed neither surprise nor emotion. He was pleased to see a pretty face, and that was all. "I think you must be grateful to me for having sent for you," remarked Bosc, raising his voice, so as to be heard by Babiole and her uncle. "You were walking about there under the leafless trees, with no horizon but the walls, while the prospect here is much more agreeable."

"But not for long," replied Number Nineteen, smiling sadly.

"For twenty minutes longer, at least," replied his companion, glancing at his watch, "and later on, you can think of the persons you are now looking at. They will return next Thursday, perhaps, and if you recognize them when they arrive, that will be making some progress."

"Well, comrade, how do you feel to-day?" cried Uncle Auguste, who could hold his tongue no longer.

"About the same," was Marbeuf's gloomy reply.

"I was just relating your story to my niece, and she would not believe me."

"I can very readily understand that mademoiselle should find it difficult to believe. There are moments when I can scarcely believe it myself."

"It is so extraordinary," stammered Babiole, who was on thorns.

"So extraordinary, mademoiselle," said Bosc, delighted to have an opportunity of entering into conversation with such a pretty girl, "so extraordinary that only a few hours ago one of the students expressed the opinion that this worthy fellow was only fooling us, and that he could tell us his name and history if he chose."

"I only wish I could," replied Marbeuf. "I assure you I should not be vegetating here."

"Oh, you will soon be at liberty. One of these days, if other means prove ineffectual, Dr. Valbrègue will probably decide to take you with him about Paris. If I were master here, it would have been done before now. I have suggested the idea to him, and I will again."

"Thank you, sir; I firmly believe that it is the only way to cure me. The sight of some familiar object, a shop or a sign, will perhaps suffice to restore the lost thread of my recollections. And now I think of it," he added in subdued tones and turning to Bosc, "a moment ago, when I perceived mademoiselle, it seemed to me that this was not the first time I had seen her. I thought of a staircase, and a door-keeper's room, and in some way connected her with them. It was absurd, of course; but the impression only lasted for a second. I was deceived, probably; mademoiselle's face is not one to be forgotten when one has once seen it. But a meeting with some other person might illumine my poor brain which is

always enshrouded in darkness. In the meantime," he continued sadly, "I must practise patience, for I am obliged to admit that all my efforts to remember only result in fatiguing me. For instance, ever since this morning, I have been constantly racking my brain, and I feel as exhausted as if I had been tramping over ploughed ground for hours. I can scarcely stand, and when the nurse called me, I was just coming up to go to bed."

"Then lie down, my friend, and try to sleep," said Bosc, kindly.

"I am going to try. Excuse me, mademoiselle," said Marbeuf, politely, raising his voice.

Babiole bowed without replying. There were tears in her eyes. Marbeuf laid down; but little Bosc did not allow the conversation to drop. "Mademoiselle, you have almost effected a marvellous cure," he said, gaily. "Music has charms to soothe the savage breast and beauty kindles intelligence. A little more, and your presence would have recalled our patient's memory and all the *savants* at the Academy of Medicine would be talking of you."

"I can't say that I am at all particular about that," murmured Babiole.

"Then you never saw this poor fellow before you came here?" inquired Bosc.

"No, sir."

"Do you take my niece for a private inquiry agent?" growled Uncle Auguste.

"You are quick to take offence, it seems to me. It is a great mistake to get so excited. It may do you a serious injury in your present condition."

"Do you consider my uncle dangerously ill?" inquired Babiole.

"Oh, no, he is out of danger, but we must avoid a relapse. Relapses are very dangerous things, and it is for that reason I beg of him not to become excited. But some one is waiting for me, so I must bid you good-morning, mademoiselle. However, one word more, if you will permit it. Pray relate Number Nineteen's history to all your acquaintances—you may be of great assistance to us in that way—and at the same time give a description of his personal appearance. You may know some one who can put us on the right track." Thereupon, raising his cap, Bosc moved away.

"A fine idea, to give you a commission like that!" muttered Uncle Auguste, sullenly. "I am not at all anxious to oblige the fool, and I think it would be much better, now that he has gone away, to ask Number Nineteen if he doesn't remember you."

"No, no, not to-day," replied Babiole. "Don't you see that he is asleep?"

"Asleep—or pretending to sleep, I don't know which."

"Besides, the clock has just struck three, and I shall have to go off with the rest of the visitors. Will you promise me not to say anything to him about me until next Thursday?"

"With pleasure. I am more and more convinced that this fellow has committed some crime, and I have no desire to become any better acquainted with him."

"I shall be able to ascertain the truth between now and Thursday; and on my next visit, I will tell you what I have learned."

"Very well. I am not particularly anxious to know, however. Write to Madame Divet, resigning your position, and remain quietly at home. I will attend to all the rest; and now, as you have to go, give me a kiss."

Babiole kissed her uncle affectionately upon both cheeks, and followed the crowd of visitors after casting another glance at the sleeping Marbeuf.

She found herself at the very end of the throng, and it was useless for her to attempt to force her way through it. Nor was she in any haste; she was thinking of the two friends who had been her neighbours, though rather more of André than of Marbeuf. "I must see him," she said to herself; "but where shall I find him? I forgot to ask him for his address last evening. He promised to come and see me, but will he do so? I cannot defer telling him about what is going on here. If I only knew in what bank he is employed! But now I think of it, my uncle just told me that Chantepie is cashier at Monsieur Vernelle's in the Rue Bergère—and Monsieur André said he saw Chantepie every day—so they must both be employed in the same establishment. Ah, well, I will go there, and ask for him."

These thoughts darted through Babiole's mind while she was descending the stairs. She had just reached the hall below, when Bosc, who was smoking his pipe at the door of a room, recognised her and stepped forward saying: "Pray, excuse me, mademoiselle, but I should like to say another word to you about Number Nineteen. Would you believe it, I can't rid myself of the idea that the poor fellow knows you. His eyes brightened on perceiving you."

"I can't understand why."

"It is possible that you have forgotten him, but if I repeated to you what he said to me, the circumstances of your meeting might occur to you."

"I think not," murmured Babiole, still firmly resolved to remain silent.

"Still, you might repeat what he said—"

"Gladly, if you will come in."

"Where?"

"Into this guard-room here. If I should be seen talking with you on the staircase, it might occasion remark. You cannot imagine how particular they are here. I have some very interesting things to tell you."

"Thank you, sir, but—"

"Oh, you need not be afraid; you will not be alone with me. Gimbert, one of the assistant surgeons, is there, and Mother Colas, our matron, is making us some coffee. So pray come in."

Babiole hesitated. She was dying to know what Marbeuf had said upstairs, for she had seen him whispering with Bosc before he threw himself on the bed; but, on the other hand, what would these young men think of her if she accepted the invitation? Still, she was not afraid of them; and they seemed much less formidable than the old scoundrel whom she had so cleverly managed to elude on leaving the theatre. "Very well," she said, finally, "but I can only remain an instant. I am in a great hurry."

"Five minutes only, mademoiselle," exclaimed Bosc, standing aside to let her pass.

The room she entered was a square apartment, with white-washed walls. It overlooked an inner courtyard, and was very scantily furnished. An iron bedstead, on which the house doctor on duty slept at night, a large book-case filled with old medical newspapers and note-books; a copper water-tank with a basin of the same material affixed to the wall; a long list of patients' names, with the numbers of their beds; a stove, at which an old woman in a mob-cap was preparing some coffee; and in one corner a deal table, on which a red-haired young man was leaning, while he pored over some old books. This studious personage raised his head, glanced at Babiole over his spectacles, and then resumed his reading. The old woman

made a grimace, and began to poke the ashes in the hope of reviving a nearly extinct fire.

"Mademoiselle," said Bosc, offering Babiole a cane-seated chair, "excuse me for not offering you better accommodation, but the department of public charities neglects to provide us with very luxurious seats."

"It is not necessary to apologise, sir," replied the young girl. "I haven't time to sit down, and I can listen to you very well standing. Pray tell me what that unfortunate young man said about me, with as little delay as possible?"

"He told me he thought he had met you on a staircase near a door-keeper's room. Perhaps he has visited some inmate of the house in which you live?"

"I don't think so," murmured Babiole.

"At all events, we can at least try the experiment. I shall repeat what he said to Dr. Valbrègue to-morrow, and if you will have the kindness to give me your address, our chief will bring the fellow to your house."

Whether Bosc merely wanted a pretext to call upon her, or whether he was really actuated by a desire to solve the mystery, mattered but little to Babiole. She was determined that Marbeuf should not be identified before she had informed André of her discovery. So, pretending to regard the proposal as a mere jest, she answered: "You are joking, sir. I live in too plain a way to receive a visit from a celebrated physician, so it is useless for me to give you my address."

"Why, I promise you that I will not abuse your kindness."

"I believe you, but I never give my address to anyone. That is one of my principles. Besides, such a visit would do no good whatever. The poor fellow has only dreamed this, and such an experiment would only confuse him still more."

"How quickly you decide the question, mademoiselle. Dr. Valbrègue is a most able physician, and yet all his learning and talent have availed him but little in this case. However, since you refuse to help us, I shall report the matter to him to-morrow morning, and he will then decide what it is best to do; but I warn you that he will blame me very much for having allowed you to leave."

"You would not detain me by force, I am sure?" said Babiole, approaching the door.

"No, mademoiselle, certainly not, but—"

Bosc did not finish his sentence; it was cut short by the boisterous entrance of Houssais, who pushed the door open so violently that Babiole recoiled in alarm.

"Take care, stupid!" cried Bosc.

"I wasn't aware that you had visitors," replied the intruder, staring at Babiole; "but I only wanted to say a word or two. I have just left the laboratory. What do you think that the powder, which Valbrègue gave me to analyze, contains?"

"I am not particularly anxious to know."

"But I am going to tell you, all the same. Some poorly prepared bro-made, mingled with strychnine—yes, my good fellow, strychnine, four milligrammes to the powder—just enough to poison a man slowly and almost imperceptibly, but none the less surely."

"The deuce! If Valbrègue's patient doesn't change his chemist, he won't live a month."

"Nor even a fortnight."

"You had better go and see him, and advise him to stop taking his medicine at once."

"But I don't know either his name or address."

"That's a fact. Valbrègue neglected to give you any information about his patient. Well, go and see the doctor without delay. He will be very grateful to you for warning him."

"I am quite willing to do so, but the question is, where can I find him? He is never at home on Sundays."

"Still, you had better try—and if you don't find him, leave a message for him. He will get it this evening, and can then take the necessary steps to save his patient."

"It is time he did. I will also leave him the rest of the powder, so that he can have it analyzed by some of the experts of the prefecture of police. It is a very strange affair, and the druggist who prepared the prescription is likely to have an uncomfortable time of it. Still, the powders may have been tampered with, after they left his hands—"

"That is quite possible, and I advise you to be prudent. Don't speak of the matter to anyone but Valbrègue, and, above all, no gossip here in the hospital. Mademoiselle has heard what you said, but I am sure that we can rely upon her discretion."

However, mademoiselle was already gliding out of the room. "I shall ask your uncle for your address," Bosc called after her.

Babiole did not turn, but the blow told, and she said to herself: "If my uncle gives it to him, they will bring Marbeuf to the house to-morrow, and Heaven only knows what the result will be! I haven't a moment to lose in warning Monsieur André; so I must go at once to Monsieur Vernelle's to make inquiries about him."

VI.

WHILE Babiole was talking at the Necker Hospital with Louis Marbeuf, whom André Subligny had so long sought for in vain, Clémence Vernelle was weeping in the arms of her father, who did not even try to console her, for he knew everything, and had ceased to hope. After spending the night in cursing the shameless creature who had returned to Paris to dishonour his name, and asking himself what measures he should take to rid his daughter of the presence of her infamous mother, M. Vernelle had received an early call from Bertaud, who came to announce the financial disaster of the preceding day.

The interview had been a stormy one; Bertaud audaciously denying that he had purposely compromised the interests of the man to whom he owed so much—for ten years previously M. Vernelle had raised him from abject poverty. The scoundrel even had the impudence to accuse Vernelle of negligence. He denied having received any order to sell; he denied that he had operated on his own account, and that he had abused Vernelle's confidence and credit, and enriched himself at the banker's expense. In short, he denied everything, and his victim was not in a position to prove the falsity of his assertions. Towards the close of the interview, Bertaud's manner became so insolent that M. Vernelle was obliged to show him the door. However, this well-merited expulsion could not avert the banker's ruin. It was complete. Everything that he possessed, everything that the failure at Marseilles had left him, would scarcely suffice to pay his

liabilities at the end of the month, and in twenty days that fatal date would be reached.

It was Sunday; the offices were closed, and Chantepie had not made his appearance, so that Vernelle could not apprise him of the catastrophe, which was the more terrible as it had been so unexpected, for only the previous day, before the Bourse opened, Vernelle had told his cashier that he had been warned of a decline in prices, and had taken measures accordingly. Before apprising his daughter of the blow, he had resolved to leave no means untried to avert the catastrophe, and he had appealed to his friends in banking circles for the assistance which he had not refused them under similar circumstances. But people are only willing to lend money to the rich, and rumours of Vernelle's embarrassment were already rife in the financial world, so that he was merely vouchsafed some commonplace words of consolation and more or less polite refusals. The morning was spent in this way, and Clémence had to breakfast alone. André, also, had failed to make his appearance, though he was in the habit of calling every Sunday morning to receive his employer's instructions, or, at all events, if he had called, he had not dared to ask to see Clémence in her father's absence.

The poor child was in despair, though she as yet had no idea of the extent of her misfortune. One day, when she was ten years old, and loved her mother devotedly, her father came to tell her that her mother had just started on a long journey. She had not learned the sad truth until long afterward; in fact, not until she left boarding-school, where she remained until she was seventeen years of age. Then M. Vernelle told her on this sad subject all that a young girl could hear without her modesty being shocked. "Forget her, as I have forgotten her," were the desolate father's concluding words.

And Clémence had tried hard to obey him, but she had not succeeded. Her mother's features were indelibly impressed on her memory, and though she never spoke of her for fear of reviving M. Vernelle's grief, she constantly thought of her, hoping she would some day be brought repentant to her husband's feet by the power of maternal love. Clémence indeed dreamed of reconciling her parents, and caring little about the opinion of Parisian society, she sometimes said to herself: "If I met her, I am sure I should recognize her, and I certainly could not help throwing my arms round her neck."

She had not foreseen, however, that she would again see her mother, for the first time, openly parading her shame in an opera-box. That cruel ordeal had been in store for her, however, and she had endured it courageously. She had done what it was right she should do, unhesitatingly, but not without suffering. And this cruel blow had fallen upon her just as her father had betrothed her to the man she loved. Misfortunes, it should be remembered, never come singly. M. Vernelle returned home at two o'clock in the afternoon, and told her the rest. Out of delicacy he refrained from speaking of her mother, but he explained the financial situation to her very clearly. He did not conceal from her that ruin and poverty stared them in the face, for he had resolved to devote every penny, if necessary, to the payment of his liabilities.

In this respect also, Clémence had shown no signs of weakness. Instead of complaining, she had cordially approved his plans, and declared that she was willing to make any sacrifice. A life devoid of luxury, and even fraught with privations had no terrors for her; and her father, seeing her so brave and calm almost regained courage.

He would gladly have shortened the painful interview, but there was one point which had to be settled. On the previous evening, only a moment before the arrival of his wife, and while he was still ignorant of the final result of his speculations, Vernelle had promised his secretary his daughter's hand, and the two young people had plighted their troth under his very eyes and with his formal approbation. What was the promise worth now, however? Would André Subligny still feel inclined to keep it and marry the dowerless daughter of a woman who had sunk to the lowest depths of degradation? And even if he felt so inclined, was it not the banker's duty to acquaint him with the deplorable facts without delay, and release him?

Clémence read her father's thoughts, and spared him the pain of making this announcement. "Yes," she said firmly, "we will do our duty unto the end. You will give up all your property to your creditors, and I, although I love André and shall always love him, will not marry him. I know him well enough to feel sure that our misfortunes will not change his feelings, but I won't blight his future by compelling him to share our troubles."

"I expected no less of you," replied M. Vernelle, deeply touched; "and since you are so heroic in your self-abnegation, I will call on Monsieur Subligny and tell him that this marriage is no longer to be thought of. I will, at the same time, advise him to look for another situation, and I will even assist him in procuring one. My recommendation will be of some service, and with the business talents he possesses, I am sure he will make his way in some more fortunate establishment than mine."

"And he will marry some young girl less deeply disgraced than myself," said Clémence. "I have but one favour to ask; that is, to be allowed to see him once more. I do not wish him to misunderstand the real cause of my refusal. He will think, perhaps, that I am only acting in obedience to orders from you. So I wish to tell him myself that it is entirely of my own accord that I renounce the happiness of being his wife, and even though he may insist, I shall have strength to withstand his entreaties."

"You are right, my dear girl, and I think you will certainly see him to-day. I am even a little surprised that he has not come before now, for he is sincerely devoted to me; and however quiet the life he leads may be, it seems to me impossible that the rumours which are in circulation about me should not have reached his ears. Besides," added Vernelle, after some slight hesitation, "our abrupt departure last evening must have astonished him, and he may have guessed the cause of it. I had no intention of concealing the truth from him, however, for I invited him to call on me this morning for the express purpose of acquainting him with all the facts. Perhaps he has called unknown to us. I went out very early this morning, and on my return, I quite forgot to ask my valet if any one had been here. Ring the bell, if you please."

"Pierre is going to bring you a cup of chocolate that I ordered to be prepared for you, for I feel sure that you have eaten nothing to-day." So saying, Clémence rang, and Pierre entered carrying a tray.

"Has Monsieur Subligny been here this morning?" inquired the banker.

"Yes, sir. I forgot to tell you, sir. He called while you were engaged with Monsieur Bertaud, and he said he would not intrude then."

"Did he say that he would call again?"

"Yes, sir; and in fact there is some one in the ante-room waiting to see him."

"Who is it?"

"A young woman, sir," replied the footman, dubiously.

Clémence glanced up hastily, and M. Vernelle said with a frown: "You must have made a mistake, or else she has."

"Excuse me, sir, but this young person certainly wishes to see Monsieur Subligny, and upon very urgent business, so she says. I told her that he was not here just now. Then she wanted to know where he lived; but I did not venture to give her his address without your permission, so I merely told her that Monsieur Subligny might come in at any moment, and advised her to wait for him at the street-door. You rang, sir, while I was talking with her, so I left her in the ante-room; but if she hasn't gone, I will send her away at once."

"No, no," interposed Clémence, quickly. "I want to see her. Tell her that Monsieur Subligny is here, and bring her in."

Pierre bowed, and turned to leave the room.

"What a strange idea!" exclaimed the banker. "Why are you so anxious to see this young woman?"

"To find out if she isn't the same person who smiled at André at the Opéra Comique, last evening?"

"Can it be that you are jealous?" asked M. Vernelle, sadly.

"And what if I am?" retorted Clémence, almost sullenly.

She was very pale, and her eyes sparkled dangerously. She was no longer a girl resigned to sacrificing her happiness to the terrible exigencies of the situation, but a woman who loved and who wished to be loved in return, entirely and without reserve.

"You no longer have any right to be jealous," replied M. Vernelle.

"He will never be your husband. So he is free."

"He was not free yesterday, and I want to know if he was deceiving me."

"And you are going to insist upon an explanation with a person you don't know, and who, perhaps, is a woman of doubtful character. The idea is absurd, and I will not allow it. I must go first and see who she is."

The banker was about to rise when the door opened and Babiole appeared.

"It is she!" murmured Clémence.

Babiole had paused upon the threshold, and seemed to be contemplating a retreat, but the valet gently pushed her forward. "Come in, mademoiselle," said M. Vernelle.

"Excuse me, sir," she said, in evident embarrassment, "I asked to see Monsieur Subligny. The servant assured me he was here."

"I am expecting him every moment. What do you desire of him?"

"I wish to speak with him about several things that interest him—him alone, sir. I regret having disturbed you, and I will retire—"

"Pray remain, mademoiselle," interrupted the banker. He knew Paris, and his long experience in business life had made him a clever physiognomist; so he had only to glance at this girl of sixteen to read her true character. Babiole was clad like an honest working girl, and her charming face wore an expression which was almost equivalent to a certificate of good character. Clémence, too, in her secret heart, did the girl justice, and was ashamed of her former suspicions; but she was none the less anxious to have an explanation. "Even if the matter is of grave importance, you can confide it to me," resumed M. Vernelle. "M. Subligny is my secretary, and also my friend, and my daughter's presence need not prevent you from speaking."

"You are very kind, sir, but I fear it would not be right, and if you will kindly give me Monsieur Subligny's address—"

"What! don't you know where he lives?"

"No, sir. My acquaintance with him is very slight. I have only spoken to him three times, at the most."

"But he lived in the same house as you," murmured Clémence.

"Did he tell you so?" exclaimed Babiole.

"Yes, mademoiselle. He told me so last evening at the Opéra Comique, where you occupied a seat near us. You saw us, I suppose?"

"Yes, mademoiselle; but you did not remain until the end of the performance, and I met Monsieur Subligny on leaving the theatre. It was then that I spoke to him for the third time."

"Then how does it happen that you are ignorant of his address?"

"I did not think to ask him for it. He only told me that he was employed at a bank."

"And you quite forgot to speak to him about the important matter that brings you here?"

This was said in a dry tone that greatly disconcerted poor Babiole. Her eyes fell, and blushing to her very ears, she stammered: "Yesterday I did not know what I know now."

"What is it you know, pray?"

Babiole drew herself up haughtily. She was not inclined to answer the questions of a person who had no right to question her, and she was probably about to make a rather impertinent reply, when M. Vernelle hastily interposed. He saw the danger, and not wishing this rather singular interview to degenerate into a feminine quarrel, he gently said: "No one here, mademoiselle, has any intention of wounding you, and I am sure that you have news of an important and urgent character for Monsieur Subligny. He resides close by, but you would not find him at home, and he will certainly call here to-day. He may arrive at any moment. Won't you sit down and wait until he comes?"

"Thank you, sir, but I should be very sorry to intrude upon you any longer. It will be quite enough for Monsieur Subligny to know that I should like to see him as soon as possible, for I am sure that he will have the kindness to call on me, especially if you will add that it is in connection with his friend, Monsieur Marbeuf, that I wish to speak to him."

"The gentleman whose rooms he shared on his arrival in Paris?" inquired Clémence, already greatly mollified.

"Yes, mademoiselle. Monsieur Subligny only remained there twenty-four hours, but it was then that I made his acquaintance, for Monsieur Marbeuf was my neighbour."

"But he has gone away—has left Paris, I believe?"

"I thought so; but he is still here."

"Monsieur Subligny assured me to the contrary."

"Monsieur Subligny was mistaken. It is to tell him where his friend is, that I am so anxious to see him."

"Then pray remain, mademoiselle," exclaimed Clémence, "remain, I beg of you."

The two young girls exchanged glances, and a treaty of peace was instantly concluded. This compact was eminently satisfactory to Babiole, who was not yet conscious of the nature of the sentiments that André had inspired in her heart; still less, did she cherish any hope of marrying him, so without a word, she accepted the chair which M. Vernelle placed for her

between his daughter and himself. She accepted it indeed with very good grace, and now seemed to be waiting for some one to question her. "This is Sunday," the banker remarked, "a holiday for all my employés, and even for Subligny, who is my secretary. But for that—"

"Oh, I did not expect to find him here," interrupted Babiole; "but I thought I might ascertain his address. It was only by chance that I learned he was employed at your bank, sir; for he did not tell me your name. But my uncle who collects bills informed me that Monsieur Chantepie was your cashier—"

"What! do you know Chantepie also?" inquired M. Vernelle, greatly astonished.

"I saw him years ago, when I was only a child; but I have good reason to remember him; and as Monsieur Subligny told me he was employed in the same establishment as this—this man, I looked in the directory, found out where you lived, and came here without losing a moment."

"Is the matter so very urgent then?"

"I think so. Monsieur Subligny must particularly wish to ascertain the whereabouts of his missing friend."

"His missing friend, did you say?"

"Yes, sir. On the evening of the day when Monsieur Subligny arrived in Paris, Monsieur Marbeuf did not return home. That was more than a month ago, and no one had heard anything about him since then. Our door-keeper thinks he must be dead, and his furniture is about to be sold."

"It won't be, now that you have discovered the missing man. But where is this young fellow, for he must be young, as he was at school with Subligny, who is scarcely twenty-six?"

"Pardon me, sir, but I would rather not tell you where he is."

"And why?"

"Because it is a secret that does not belong to me. Monsieur Subligny will tell you, I'm sure of it; but I would rather reveal my discovery to him alone."

"As you please, mademoiselle. He will be at liberty to keep the secret, if he likes, for I shall not ask it of him. But it seems to me that you have a rather poor opinion of my cashier," added M. Vernelle, smiling. "May I ask you what he has done? Is that, also, a secret?"

"No, sir; but I did not come here to complain of Monsieur Chantepie. I have no desire to denounce him."

"I approve that, mademoiselle. Denouncing a person is cowardly when the information is given from interested motives, as is almost always the case. Still, there are times when one fulfills a duty by revealing a man's past. If I have intrusted my safe to Monsieur Chantepie's keeping, it is only because I have no reason to doubt his integrity; so you would do me a great service by enlightening me in regard to his antecedents, with which I am but slightly acquainted. I took him into my employ ten years ago, because he was recommended to me by—by a person in whom I then felt implicit confidence."

"Ten years ago he had just ruined my father!" exclaimed Babiole, carried away by a feeling of indignation.

"What is that you say?"

"It is only the truth, sir. My father had made a modest fortune in business. He was foolish enough to intrust it to this Chantepie, who promised to make it yield a handsome profit at the Bourse."

"He may have been in perfect good faith when he advised your father. The cleverest and the best-meaning people are sometimes deceived."

"My father had proofs that his orders were not executed, and that the money he lost enriched Monsieur Chantepie; but, unfortunately, these proofs, although perfectly satisfactory to him, would not have been admitted in a court of justice, so he brought no action. He preferred to die."

"What!" exclaimed Clémence, "is it possible that he—"

"Yes, mademoiselle, and my mother died of grief. I am an orphan, and I earn my living by working in a millinery shop."

Mademoiselle Vernelle, moved to tears, stretched out her hand to Babiole, who dared not take it. M. Vernelle, recollecting the disaster which had just befallen him by reason of Bertaud's treachery, began to ask himself if the broker had not conspired with Chantepie to defraud him. But he deemed it his duty to keep his suspicions to himself, so he endeavoured to change the subject. "I feel very faint," he remarked abruptly. "Permit me to drink this chocolate, mademoiselle; but first give me my powder, Clémence."

"You forget that Dr. Valbrègue ordered you to stop taking the bromide, yesterday."

"'Until to-morrow,' he said, and it is now to-morrow; if he had desired a further delay, he would have let me know, so give me my usual allowance."

Clémence thereupon handed her father a powder—she was in the habit of keeping some constantly in her pocket—and the banker was about to empty it into a glass of water which the valet had brought in with the chocolate, when Babiole exclaimed: "Stop, sir!"

M. Vernelle turned and looked at her as if asking himself if she were not going mad. She had suddenly turned pale, and had half risen from her chair, at the same time making a gesture as if she wished to catch hold of his arm. "What is the matter with you, mademoiselle?" asked the banker, in astonishment.

"That powder!" murmured the young girl.

"That powder is a remedy prescribed by my physician."

"And your physician's name is Valbrègue, is it not?"

"Yes, mademoiselle; and the medicine is bromide."

"It is poison!" exclaimed Babiole.

"Poison! Do you think my daughter would poison me?"

"No, certainly not; but I am sure of what I say, and I beseech you not to take this drug."

Clémence said nothing, but she snatched the powder from her father's hands. "Explain yourself, mademoiselle, if you please," said the banker.

"How can you know all this?"

"Didn't your physician announce his intention of having this medicine analyzed?"

"Yes, and he took away one of the powders for that purpose, but—"

"And doesn't this doctor have charge of one of the hospitals?"

"Of the Necker Hospital, yes."

"Then you are certainly the person they were talking about, just now."

"Where?"

"At the hospital. I have just come from there. How fortunate that Monsieur Subligny did not tell me where he lived yesterday."

"Why do you consider it so fortunate?"

"Because, if I had known his address, I should have gone straight to his house to tell him about the friend I just saw—"

"At the hospital? And was it there that I was the subject of conversation? I assure you, mademoiselle, that I haven't the slightest idea of what you mean. Will you kindly explain yourself more clearly? You are congratulating yourself, if I am not mistaken, upon having warned me that this powder contains a poisonous ingredient."

"I congratulate myself upon having arrived here in time to save your life."

"And I am very grateful to you for having saved me, if I really was in danger. But, on the other hand, you have given me to understand that you came here for the sole purpose of meeting my secretary, and that if you had not been so anxious to see him you would have allowed me to be poisoned. In that case I am indebted for my preservation to Subigny. What am I to believe?"

"If you will kindly listen to me, sir, you will see that I have no cause for self-reproach. I had just spent two hours by the bedside of my uncle, who is a patient in the Saint Ferdinand ward of the hospital. I was about to leave when I was stopped by one of the medical men. While we were talking about my uncle's attack of bronchitis, another medical man, a chemist, came up, and told his comrade that Dr. Valbrègue—I recollect the name—had instructed him that morning to analyse a bromide powder, which he had prescribed for one of his patients, but which did not seem to agree with him. The chemist added that he had analysed it, and satisfied himself that the powder contained strychnine."

"Strychnine!"

"Yes, strychnine, which must be a most violent poison, for the other young man remarked: 'If Valbrègue's patient continues to follow this treatment, he hasn't much longer to live.'"

"And these gentlemen allowed the matter to drop there? Why didn't they send to inform me of all this?"

"Your physician hadn't told them your name, and as I knew no more about the matter than they did, I could not come here and tell you. One of them started off in search of Dr. Valbrègue, however, but he had very little hope of finding him. You see, sir, that I have good reason to feel glad that I didn't know Monsieur Subigny's address."

The father and daughter exchanged glances. "We shall never forget what you have done, mademoiselle," said M. Vernelle, with emotion. "If we can be of service to you in any way, do not hesitate to make use of us."

"I need nothing—I only want to see Monsieur Subigny," Babiole quietly replied.

"You will see him very soon. He cannot delay much longer; and if he doesn't come, I will find him and send him to you."

"He will come here, I am almost sure," murmured Clémence.

"So I have an enemy who desires my life," said the banker, talking to himself, "for there can be no mistake. But who can the scoundrel be?"

"This powder was prepared by a chemist that Monsieur Chantepie recommended to you," interrupted Mademoiselle Vernelle. "It was Monsieur Chantepie who received the last package sent, and it was he who gave the powders to your valet."

"Chantepie!—he—no, that is impossible!"

"The man who was the cause of my father's death is capable of any crime," exclaimed Babiole.

Just then, Pierre entered the room, and whispered a few words to his master. Pierre was an intelligent and discreet servant, and had gained a

tolerably correct idea of the situation. Nothing would, therefore, have induced him to usher André Subligny into the room without first consulting M. Vernelle. The banker instantly rose up. Babiole did the same, but he made her reseal herself, and said to her, in a really affectionate tone: "Mademoiselle, both my daughter and myself beg you to remain a little while longer. I must leave you to see some one; but I hope to find you here on my return. You will not regret having waited for me, I assure you, and Clémence will keep you company."

Mademoiselle Vernelle assented, and held out her hand to Babiole, who this time did not refuse hers. The banker thanked Clémence with a glance, and went out, leaving the two girls alone together. He now knew that they were kindly disposed towards each other; and he was anxious to have an explanation with André, who was awaiting him in his office. "Thank you for having come, my friend," he said to him, on entering. "I see by your face that you have heard the bad news. You don't desert me in adversity. That is kind, very kind of you."

"Desert you!" exclaimed Subligny. "Ah, sir, I hope that you did not think me capable of such baseness."

"No, my friend, but I was anxious to see you. I have so many things to tell you! I will begin with a subject that interests you exclusively, for I am not acquainted with the young man—the one whose hospitality you accepted on your arrival in Paris—Monsieur Marbeuf, I believe."

"Yes, sir. Well, what of him?"

"He has been found."

André turned pale. Anything in any way connected with the unfortunate matter of the bank-notes always disturbed him, and the thought that Marbeuf had perhaps revealed everything to M. Vernelle, filled him with alarm. "Are you not pleased to learn that he is still in Paris?" inquired the banker.

"Certainly, sir. I shall be glad to see him again. But the news was so unexpected that it quite took away my breath. If you will have the goodness to tell me where he is—"

"I cannot do that, but there is a person here who can."

"Who?"

"You will see her in a moment; but first let us speak of my own situation, and of yours. I may as well tell you at once, that I am utterly ruined."

"I have been aware of that since last night. After you left the theatre, I met Monsieur Bertaud in the public lounge, and he told me that your order to sell out had not been executed. He even had the audacity to assure me that he had not received any such instructions from you. I won't conceal from you, sir, that I treated him as he deserved to be treated, for I am sure that he was lying. He is a treacherous scoundrel. I have proofs of that, for yesterday afternoon I received through the telephone a message that was not intended for you—a message in which he announced that he had just returned from the Bourse, where he had made a large amount of money."

"This announcement was intended for my cashier, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir. You may recollect that I mentioned this incident last evening at the theatre; but I attached very little importance to it, as I did not know that Bertaud had left you out of the operation."

"I had a long talk with him this morning, my dear André, and I am of your opinion that he betrayed my confidence; still I cannot prove that he acted with fraudulent intent. So it is useless to make any charge against

him ; and I can only submit to the consequences of a mistake which was undoubtedly intentional. I hope and believe that I shall be able to meet all my obligations, but I can no longer carry on business. Indeed I shall deem myself fortunate if my daughter and myself have anything left to live upon, when all my debts are paid."

"You will rise again, sir. I will work diligently—"

"Don't confound your situation with mine, my dear fellow. You are not involved in the misfortune that has overtaken me. You will lose a modest position by it, but I will assist you in finding a better one."

"What do you say, sir? Can you suppose that I would leave you? Am I not a member of your family?"

"You were to become my son-in-law, but you cannot marry Clémence now, for she has nothing left her. She understands that as well as I do, and she has requested me to release you from your engagement."

"I refuse to be released, and I ask you, in pity, to grant me an interview with Mademoiselle Vernelle, in order that I may tell her, in your presence, that my wishes have not changed. If I dared, I would add that the only thing that could console me for the disaster which has swept away your fortune, is that no one will now dare to accuse me of having married from mercenary motives."

"Your words do you honour, my dear André, and show me that I judged you rightly. You are the most honourable of men ; but I cannot accept such a sacrifice on your part, nor can my daughter either."

"Then she does not love me ! If she did, she would not hesitate. Do I?"

"You are mistaken, my dear fellow ; her heart hasn't changed ; and if my ruin was the only obstacle, I should perhaps advise her to marry you, as you are generous enough not to accept release. But you do not know everything. You do not know her mother."

"I saw her last evening at the theatre. A certain person took care to point her out to me."

Vernelle started. "Then you know why I left so abruptly," he said, in an unsteady voice, "and you can understand what Clémence must have suffered."

"I know all," replied André. "Monsieur Bertaud told me."

"He ! I might have known it. It wasn't enough for him to ruin me then ? He must needs drag my name through the mire, for what he told you he will tell to others. I must be the laughing-stock of all Paris by this time. Ah ! if I had only myself to think of, I would kill that woman and her lovers. But I must remember my daughter. What would become of her ? We have but one resource left ; that is to exile ourselves, and hide our shame in some distant part of the world."

"If you exile yourselves, I shall go with you. But why should you leave France ? It is for that woman to go."

"You don't know her ! She no doubt returned here expressly to defy me. I sometimes think that she likes to cause us all the suffering she can."

"She must be a monster, then."

"No, not a monster. She seems to have no idea of the atrocity of her acts. She commits crimes just as a pear-tree produces pears, and never feels the slightest twinge of remorse. You don't know the history of my marriage."

"Until yesterday I was not aware that you had a wife. My father, who so often spoke of you, always led me to suppose that you were a widower."

"I am grateful to him for his delicacy, especially as no one was better acquainted than himself with the melancholy history of my married life. He was a great friend of my wife's family before I married her, and afterwards he lived on the most intimate terms with us. When the scandal occurred, about ten years ago, he was living in Havre, but he always paid us a visit when he came to Paris."

"I was then at college."

"Yes, and he never brought you to see us, though I often begged him to do so. I have since thought, that he was perhaps aware of what was going on in my household, and that he did not wish to introduce his son to a woman who was so basely deceiving me."

"He never spoke of her to my mother. Had he done so, she would probably have given me some intimation of the truth, when she handed me the letter recommending me to you."

"It was kind of him not to tell an honest woman of my disgrace. But I must finish my story. My wife was an orphan; she had just left the convent, when I met her; she was rich, and her parents were of noble birth. Her name was Yolande de Bacqueville."

"An old Norman name."

"Yes, her ancestors were knights in the days of William the Conqueror. Mine tilled the soil; my grandfather sold handkerchiefs at fairs, and my father kept a country inn. I was just beginning to accumulate a fortune, and I felt greatly honoured that her guardian, an old and impoverished nobleman, should condescend to grant me her hand. I had met her at Dieppe, and had fallen desperately in love with her. I would gladly have married her, even if she had been poor. As it was, I insisted that she should marry under the separate property system, and the three hundred thousand francs she possessed have never been invested in my business. She always had the entire disposal of the money, and it was still in her possession when she left me. The first years of our married life were happy ones. I worked untiringly. I wanted to make her the wife of a millionaire, and I seemed to be in a fair way to accomplish my purpose. We went but little into society, though she was very fond of it. We only entertained a few friends—your father was one of the number—and yet this retired life seemed to satisfy my wife. But there was latent fire in her nature. Clémence was born—and would you believe it?—her mother's misconduct began only a year afterwards. I, alone, was ignorant of the truth. My friends ceased visiting the house. Your father's visits to Paris became more and more rare. Time went on. I was still blind to the truth, when one day Yolande eloped with a fashionable tenor. She had gone out one morning, as usual. I expected her home and waited dinner for her, but she did not return. She had taken the train for Saint Petersburg, together with one hundred thousand francs which Chantepie had given her out of my safe, in compliance with her request."

"What! was Chantepie with you then?"

"Yes; he had been in my employ about six months. It was she who first recommended him to me. I understand your suspicions, and I will speak further of this man by-and-bye; but first allow me to finish this lamentable confession. I had strength to bear the blow, and I did everything in my power to spare Clémence all possible suffering. It was a terrible blow to her, for the poor child was very fond of her mother, and indeed she has never forgotten her. It was she who first recognised her, last night at the theatre. I told her all I could tell a child of that age.

Then I sent word to that degraded creature that I would leave her in possession of her dowry and the money she had stolen from me, and not prosecute her upon one condition—that she would never set foot in France again.”

“And she accepted the terms?”

“Yes, I have a letter she wrote me from Russia, in which she acceded to my proposals, but in which she never even inquired after her daughter. I afterwards learned that she had soon squandered her fortune, and that she had become a mere adventuress. For several years past she has had an intrigue with a Russian prince, whom she deceives in the most brazen manner.”

“One of the men who accompanied her last evening?”

“Probably. However she has broken her compact, and has come to Paris to torment and humiliate me. Either she or I must leave.”

“She is the one to leave,” exclaimed Subigny.

“But who can drive her away?” asked M. Vernelle sadly. “You certainly cannot think of it, my dear André; and now that you know all, I beg of you to calmly consider what a future would await you if you married Clémence. She is my daughter, but she is also the daughter of that shameless creature.”

“What do her mother’s sins matter to me?”

“Would you have the courage to expose yourself and to expose your wife to the humiliation of again meeting the infamous creature who paraded her shame so unblushingly yesterday?”

“I swear to you that I will save Mademoiselle Vernelle from any such humiliation in future. So I trust she will not refuse to marry me.”

“What! Your resolve to marry Clémence hasn’t been weakened by the revelations that have just been made to you?”

“On the contrary, they have only strengthened it. If you will have the kindness to take me to Mademoiselle Vernelle, I will implore her to name the day for our marriage. It shall take place in a week from now, if she will consent. I merely desire time to procure an affidavit of my father’s death, and my mother’s written consent. You will not refuse yours—”

“You forget that—the consent of—this woman—is also indispensable. Will you go and ask her for it?”

“What! Mademoiselle Vernelle cannot marry without the consent of her mother who certainly lost all authority over her when she deserted her?”

“No, my friend. The law is explicit. My wife has a perfect right to oppose her daughter’s marriage, and if she refuses her consent, Clémence will be obliged to send her what is called a respectful summons. Would you advise her to submit to this humiliation?”

André hung his head; but he was not convinced, and his hesitation lasted only a moment. “I will obtain her mother’s consent myself,” he said firmly.

“How will you do it?”

“What difference does that make to you, provided I succeed? I suppose you have no fear of my resorting to unworthy means, and that you will give me *carte-blanc* in the matter?”

“Yes, but Clémence—”

“She knows nothing about the law, so it is not worth while to consult her.”

“Not upon this point, perhaps; but it will be necessary to induce her

to revoke her decision respecting the marriage. She had relinquished all hope of it. She told me so not an hour ago."

"Because she was in error respecting my feelings. But, when you tell her that I know all, and that I love her more than ever, she will not drive me to despair by a refusal."

"Why don't you tell her all this yourself?"

"I am ready to do so. When will you allow me to see her?"

"In another moment, if you like. I left her in the drawing-room."

"Does she know I am here?"

"She probably suspects it; and the time is not unfavourable. You will find her greatly agitated though by the danger I have just escaped."

"That you have just escaped!" exclaimed Subligny, in great astonishment.

"Yes, I have but narrowly escaped being poisoned. The medicine I have been taking, had already affected me considerably, and another dose might have killed me. You doubtless recollect that my physician, astonished at the effect the bromide had upon me, took a powder away with him, in order to have it analysed. Well, it seems that the medicine contained strychnine."

"Poison! that is terrible! Who could have mixed it with your bromide?"

"That is what I have been vainly asking myself. I have my suspicions, but, until I am certain, I shall be silent for fear of accusing an innocent person. Dr. Valbrègue can, perhaps, assist me in discovering the culprit. But, to return to your affairs, my dear André. Do you really wish to see my daughter?"

"I implore you to take me to her at once."

"She is not alone, however."

"Ah! I was not aware of that," stammered Subligny, somewhat disconcerted.

"A young girl whom you know, and who knows you—who seems to take a deep interest in you, in fact—is with her. She lives in the house where you stayed on your arrival in Paris. Having been a neighbour of yours, and, being very anxious to see you, she came here in search of you."

André fell from the clouds. What could Babiole want? How had she managed to discover M. Vernelle's name and address? While escorting her home, the night before, André had taken good care not to tell her his employer's name, or where he lived, for he was a little afraid of her. Some words which had escaped her, made him suspect that she was jealous of Clémence, so he was anxious to prevent the two girls from finding themselves again face to face. Accordingly, he now asked himself, with no little trepidation, what could be the object of Babiole's unexpected visit.

"You seem annoyed to learn that this young woman is here," remarked M. Vernelle.

"I am greatly astonished," replied the young secretary, "and I cannot imagine what she has to say to me. I know her so slightly."

"She has come to tell you that she has discovered your friend, Monsieur Marbeuf. He is in Paris. She has seen him, and wishes to apprise you of the fact. She did not know where you lived, but hoped to find you here; and it is very fortunate that she came, for it was she who prevented me from poisoning myself. She had just heard at the Necker Hospital that the powders I was taking contained strychnine. Consequently, we

owe her no little gratitude, and my daughter could not let her go away, though she treated her rather coldly at first. Between ourselves, my dear André, you were the cause of it, for the girl is very pretty, and Clémence is a little inclined to be jealous. But the clouds soon cleared away, and the pair are now the best friends in the world."

André breathed freely once more, although he was not greatly enlightened by the explanation. He felt that it would be best to settle the matter then and there. To hesitate about seeing Clémence in Babiole's presence, would be equivalent to confessing that there was a secret between the little milliner and himself. So André resolved to burn his ships behind him; that is to say, to speak to his betrothed exactly as if Babiole were not within hearing. Having never committed himself in any way with the young milliner, he had nothing to conceal from her; and, if she cherished any hope of winning his affections, it was time to dispel the illusion. "Very well, sir," he said, turning to the banker, "as you seem to think that my former neighbour can be present, without any impropriety, at the interview which you kindly grant me with Mademoiselle Vernelle, I beg of you not to defer it."

"You are quite right, my friend," replied the banker. "Come." And, taking André's arm, he led him into the drawing-room.

The two girls were chatting familiarly. Their friendship, indeed, seemed to be making rapid progress. Babiole blushed a little on perceiving André, but she did not appear embarrassed, and her manner completely reassured Mademoiselle Vernelle, who was furtively watching her. The most uncomfortable of the three was certainly Subligny; not that he hesitated for an instant about making his declaration, but he recollected, a little too late, that Babiole might, with a single word, place him in a position of terrible embarrassment. As she had found Marbeuf, she might know all about the story of the bank-notes, and any allusion to this matter might prompt questions from M. Vernelle, which he, Subligny, could not answer truthfully. He therefore resolved to try and avert the danger by questioning Babiole at once. "Mademoiselle," he said to her, after greeting Clémence affectionately, "I hear that you have met my friend, Marbeuf, and I shall be very happy to talk with you about the worthy fellow, who, I fear, has made a great mistake in leaving his employers. But these matters will not interest Monsieur Vernelle; and I will call in the Rue Lamartine this evening. Marbeuf will probably be there by that time, if he isn't there already."

"I was going to ask you to come," replied Babiole, unhesitatingly. "Monsieur Marbeuf needs your assistance: but it is useless to discuss his misfortunes before this gentleman and his daughter. I have, therefore, refrained from speaking to them on the subject: but I was extremely anxious to inform you of the state of affairs. Indeed, that is the only reason why I ventured to come here."

"She understands me, Heaven be praised!" thought André.

"But you will come again, I sincerely hope," said Clémence to Babiole. "I am already deeply indebted to you; and I should be very glad to have you regard me as a friend."

Babiole thanked her, but with some reserve; and Subligny, reassured as regards any imprudent revelations on the pretty milliner's part, decided to broach the question of his marriage. "Mademoiselle," said he, addressing Clémence, "your father has kindly given me permission to ask you to appoint the day for our wedding."

"Our marriage!" murmured Mademoiselle Vernelle. "Hasn't my father told you—"

"He has told me everything, mademoiselle; but my feelings have undergone no change. This is the fourteenth of March. If you are willing, we can be married before the end of the month. I entreat you to name an early day."

Clémence could not summon up courage to utter a refusal or an assent; but she gave André her hand, which he kissed ardently, yet respectfully. M. Vernelle was weeping. Babirole had become grave. It was evident that she had not been prepared for this scene, and that it made her feel anything but comfortable. She was already preparing to leave, but ere she did so, André walked straight to M. Vernelle, who opened his arms, and who pressed him to his heart, saying: "My son."

"Trust me, sir," said Subigny warmly. "In less than three days the obstacles you mentioned to me will have ceased to exist."

Clémence rose in her turn. She had understood him, for she said in a voice that trembled with emotion: "André, I belong to you, and I intrust my father's honour to your keeping. I will do my best to defeat the efforts of the persons who are trying to poison him—though who they are I cannot tell. Do not lose a moment in attending to the matter you have just spoken of; still, you must remember your friend who needs your assistance. Go to see him at once with mademoiselle, to whom we are all so deeply indebted."

André had not dared to hope for such a brilliant success; but he was none the less anxious to profit by it. M. Vernelle, also, gave him an encouraging look. "Will you permit me to dispose of to-morrow as I see fit?" Subigny inquired. "I will endeavour to make good use of my time."

"A much better use of it than in my office," replied the banker, sadly. "My business career is virtually ended; and I have no further need of a secretary, my dear André. But I rely upon seeing you to-morrow. You will dine with us, I trust; and I ardently hope you will bring us good news. I wish this more than I expect it."

Babirole seemed to have been suddenly changed into a statue. She allowed Mademoiselle Vernelle to kiss her upon both cheeks, then made a deep courtesy to M. Vernelle, and left the room without casting a single glance behind her. André followed her; and the valet stared at them in mute astonishment as they passed out, escorted to the door by his master.

In point of fact, the idea of their going off together, under the banker's protection, was a great surprise to Pierre, and upset all his notions of propriety.

Neither André nor Babirole spoke while they went down the stairs, but just as they reached the street the young milliner exclaimed: "I wasn't aware that you expected to marry your employer's daughter, though I ought to have known it by the way you were looking at her last night. Rich young ladies are very fortunate. They can marry to please themselves. I shall never marry."

"Why not?" replied Subigny. "When Mademoiselle Vernelle is my wife, we will find a nice husband for you, and—"

But he saw that Babirole was not listening to him. In fact, she was looking at two men standing near the corner of the Rue Rougemont. "It is he!" she murmured, laying her hand on André's arm. "It is that hateful Chantepie. He has seen us, and is coming towards us. I don't intend

to wait for him, for I should certainly tear his eyes out if he said a word to me. I shall be at home all day to-morrow, so call at whatever hour you like, and I will tell you where Monsieur Marbeuf is." Thereupon, without giving Subligny any time to protest, Babiole ran lightly down the street, and in another minute was out of sight.

Meanwhile Chantepie came forward, having left his companion, a shabbily dressed young fellow, at the street corner. André had no more desire than Babiole to enter into conversation with the cashier; but it was too late to avoid him. "Good morning, my dear fellow," cried Chantepie. "That was a very pretty girl. Why did she run away as soon as she saw me? Wasn't it the same girl I met in your friend Marbeuf's room the day I first made your acquaintance? She ran away that morning too. She seems to be afraid of me. You show very good taste in your selections; but you do very wrong to make an appointment at your employer's door, for if his daughter should see you, it would not improve your prospects."

"You are very much mistaken in regard to the young lady who was with me," said Subligny, angrily.

"Calm yourself, my dear fellow. I have no right to meddle with your love affairs, I know; but a few words of good advice are never amiss. Let us change the subject. You know that Vernelle is ruined, I suppose?"

"Yes; and I also know that he has been basely defrauded by Bertaud?"

"Defrauded! The deuce! you are putting it pretty strong; and if Bertaud heard you—"

"I am ready to repeat to him what I just said to you."

"I don't deny it. But what are you going to do? The house will go to pieces, and I sha'n't remain in it. Vernelle won't need a cashier when his safe is empty, as will soon be the case. I can easily obtain a position elsewhere; but what will become of you?"

"What business is it of yours what becomes of me?"

"You seem to be offended with me. Why, I should like to know? Because I lent you a hundred thousand francs to keep you from blowing your brains out—a hundred thousand francs to replace the money your friend Marbeuf took away with him to foreign parts? In that case, you would do as well to repay the loan before insulting me."

André had a startling response upon his lips. He was strongly tempted to reply: "Marbeuf is found; Marbeuf is in Paris, and will vindicate himself," but he paused in time, remembering that it was not advisable for him to say this until he had seen his friend. However, Chantepie had gone too far, and the young secretary resolved to break off all connection with him then and there. "Sir, this is the second time that you have taunted me with my indebtedness to you," he said, drawing himself up haughtily. "You forced the service, to which you allude, upon me. I will pay you legal interest on the amount as long as I live, and at my death the loan will be repaid by an insurance company; but I cannot allow you to give me instructions and orders in regard to matters that don't in the least concern you. I even request you not to speak to me again; and if this language displeases you, I am ready to fight with you whenever you like."

"Thanks; you might kill me, or I might kill you, and in either case, I should lose my money, for insurance companies don't pay the policies of people who are killed in duels or who commit suicide. So I sha'n't fight with you, and I hope that you have given up all idea of blowing your brains out, for your happiness is now virtually assured. Mademoiselle Vernelle loves you, and will marry you whenever you like."

"I forbid your mentioning that young lady's name."

"Of course I could prevent this marriage," continued Chantepie, without paying the slightest attention to his companion's remarks. "If I sent Vernelle or his daughter the letter you were writing just as I arrived to save you—the letter in which you confess having stolen—"

"My letter to Marbeuf?"

"Yes, it is explicit enough; I have preserved it among my papers, together with your receipt, which is also sufficiently plain. 'I hereby acknowledge that Monsieur Chantepie has paid into Monsieur Vernelle's safe, in my stead, the sum of one hundred thousand francs, due from me to the said safe,'—that's how the receipt runs, if my memory serves me rightly. What do you think would be the result if I exhibited those documents?"

André remained silent. He realized that he was at this man's mercy, and he nearly choked with rage.

"But you need have no fear, my dear fellow," continued Chantepie. "I sha'n't make use of them, and I wouldn't injure you for the world. I am a little rough, sometimes, for I haven't had the same training as you, but I liked you from the very first, and when you learn to know me better you will regret having so misjudged me. You imagine, I'm sure, that if I am anxious for you to marry Mademoiselle Vernelle, it is solely because I want to have my money back. But I will convince you to the contrary. Mademoiselle Vernelle won't have any dowry, and her father will leave her nothing. Handsome and well-mannered as you are, you might marry a very wealthy heiress. Still, I urge you more strongly than ever to marry Mademoiselle Vernelle. Why? Because I know that you love her, and that she will make you perfectly happy. This is certainly disinterested advice. Not that I renounce all hope of being repaid some day, by any means. I have great hopes of your future. I feel sure that you will make a fortune, so I need not depend upon your bride's dowry for payment."

This was said with a kindly frankness which somewhat modified André's convictions. It might be, after all, that the cashier was a sort of surly benefactor, and that Babiole erred in her estimate of him. "Shall I give you another proof of my good faith?" continued Chantepie. "I told you yesterday that Madame Vernelle had turned out badly. Still, she is Mademoiselle Clémence's mother, and you cannot marry without her consent. Now I know that she has just arrived in Paris, which is very unfortunate for her husband, as well as for you; as she is quite capable of refusing her consent if only to infuriate poor Vernelle, and cause a scandal which you would no doubt prefer to avoid. Well, that being the case, would you like her to grant you permission to marry her daughter, and then would you like her to return to the country whence she came—namely Muscovy?"

"Are you acquainted with her?" exclaimed Subligny.

"I have known her for at least twenty years. It was she who secured me my situation at Vernelle's."

"I know it. He told me so."

"Ah!" said Chantepie, evidently somewhat disconcerted. Then quickly recovering himself, he added: "Oh, yes, Vernelle saw her last night at the Opéra Comique. Bertaud told me so. It seems, by the way, that you treated poor Bertaud rather shabbily, but that is no concern of mine. I now understand how Vernelle came to tell you about his wife. He was compelled to explain why he had run away as soon as he saw her. However, he couldn't have told you his wife's present situation, since he

isn't acquainted with it. I'm acquainted with it, however, and it would be as well for you to know something about it, unless you have abandoned the idea of marrying—"

"Mademoiselle Vernelle will be my wife before the end of the month."

"I congratulate you most heartily, my dear fellow. It is a decision that does you honour, and I assure you that you won't regret it," said Chantepie, warmly. "I am so delighted that I will overlook anything—your ungracious greeting, your proposal to fight, or your indebtedness. You can pay me whenever it suits your convenience. I am in no hurry; and if I can do anything to facilitate your marriage, it will afford me the greatest pleasure imaginable. The main thing is to obtain Madame Vernelle's consent. At the present time she is living with Prince Lipetsk, who has had about enough of her. He regards her very much as a galley-slave regards his ball and chain, and is only waiting for an opportunity to get rid of her. If he does abandon her, matters will be even worse, for she will sink still lower, and mark this, he will abandon her instantly, if he discovers that she is a married woman."

"Is it possible that he is still ignorant of that fact?"

"Quite so. She has made him believe that she is the widow of some country gentleman in Normandy. Now, as the prince would cast her adrift penniless if he knew the truth, you need only threaten her with exposure to gain her consent to your marriage. You might also hint that Vernelle means to prosecute her. That would be decisive. If I were in your place, I would go and see her. She occupies a charming furnished house, No. 47 Rue Galilée, and is known as the Baroness d'Orbec. If you go at once you will be sure to find her at home; she always returns from her afternoon drive at about five o'clock, and does not dine until eight. If I were in your place, as I said before, I would go and see her, and lay down my conditions."

"What conditions?"

"I should first demand her consent to her daughter's marriage—her written consent—couched in legal terms. She won't hesitate to give it if you threaten her properly. Afterwards I should extort from her a promise to leave Paris immediately. That will be a more difficult task, for the prince wishes to spend the winter here, but he will cheerfully allow her to go to Nice or Monaco alone; and in that case, you will be well rid of her, at least until the spring. But you have no time to lose, for Vernelle is ailing, and this new trouble won't do him any good. He may die any day, and when he is dead you will have no means of action against Yolande."

André started as he thought of the attempt to poison Vernelle, but he could no longer suspect Chantepie, who proposed a plan of action dependent upon the banker's existence, and he asked himself if he should follow this bold but sensible advice. If the cashier told the truth as regards Madame Vernelle, the scheme might prove successful; and besides, the banker had just given him full permission to do anything he might deem expedient to gain his wife's consent. "Go, my dear fellow," urged the cashier; "go at once. Tell her plainly that you come on behalf of her husband, but don't tell her that the marriage is decided upon. Above all, don't tell her whom Mademoiselle Vernelle is to marry, and don't introduce yourself under your real name. It is important that she shouldn't know that you are the son of Monsieur Charles Subigny, with whom she was so well acquainted in former years."

"I am not at all anxious to give my name, I am sure," muttered André.

"But you are anxious to marry Mademoiselle Clémence, and you are right. I have pointed out to you the only means of overcoming the obstacle in your path. Resort to it, and without delay. You will be married before the end of the month, and you will afterwards find that Jules Chantepie is not as bad as he seems to be. Now I must step in and see our employer, and tender him my resignation. By-bye, my dear fellow, and good luck to you in the Rue Galilée!" Thereupon, Chantepie turned and entered the banker's house, leaving André greatly perplexed.

"What am I to believe and do?" muttered the young cashier. "Am I mistaken as regards this man? Perhaps so. But why is he so anxious for me to marry Clémence?"

VII.

AT five o'clock on a March afternoon, providing the weather be fine, the Champs Elysées wear a festive air. Carriages and riders are returning from the Bois de Boulogne, and the main avenue is crowded with horses and vehicles. The walks are thronged with promenaders, and the setting sun gilds the budding leaves of the more forward trees. Even the rich hail the return of spring with pleasure, and yet for them there is no dreary season. In winter they betake themselves to the land of orange-groves; in summer, they go to the sea-side, where the breeze brings them health and exhilaration; in autumn, they shoot and hunt, and enjoy the pleasures of country life. But the poor, who vegetate from one year's end to another—the slaves of toil, whom necessity chains to offices and workrooms, the petty shop-keepers, whom business keeps indoors day after day—all greet with still greater delight the return of spring.

In years gone by, they were wont to inhale the fresh air of the suburbs; but now-a-days the lilacs at Romainville are cut down, and the wood, so dear to the heart of Paul de Kock, exists only in memory. Those who are partial to tippling still frequent the suburban taverns, where wine is less dear; but the more aspiring roam about Paris evincing a marked preference for the fashionable districts. They make the circuit of the lakes in the Bois de Boulogne on foot, and eagerly take possession of every available seat to watch the procession of carriages pass by; for when one is not rich one's self, to gaze at the wealthy is a diversion that makes one forget, at least for a while, the cares and troubles of daily life. The looker-on reflects that he himself will perhaps some day become wealthy, and the hope consoles him for his trials.

It is for the same reason that work-girls are so fond of reading romances, in which a pretty washer-woman marries a millionaire prince. They don't believe that it ever really happened, but in their secret hearts they think that it might happen, and so they await the coming of their prince. Sometimes he presents himself in the guise of a well-to-do cattle-dealer, but what does that matter, providing the dream comes true?

Babiole was not one of this class, however. She was a sensible, conscientious girl, who did not read novels, because she lacked the time to do so, and who never complained of her lot. A true philosopher, though not in the least conscious of the fact, she took life as she found it, without beguiling herself with illusions, or cherishing any chimerical hopes; and now at the age of sixteen, she reasoned much more sensibly than many of the

young ladies educated at the Convent of the Sacred Heart, and did not aspire to marry a man of a superior social position to her own. Still, her youthful prudence did not mar her powers of discernment, or prevent her from discriminating between the different young men she met; and André Subigny was the only person who had really pleased her, and who suited her in certain respects. By birth and education he belonged to a superior class, but he had no fortune; so his poverty atoned for his origin. If she had thought of him, it was because she had at first supposed that he could marry her without lowering himself; but she no longer thought so, now that chance had made her a witness of his betrothal to Clémence. Babiolo was too sensible and conscientious to dispute with Mademoiselle Vernelle for André's heart, but she found that the sacrifice would cost her much more than she had at first supposed. She had certainly done nothing to win Subigny's love, but now that he could not love her without breaking the vows he had plighted to another, she regretted him. This feeling, for which she blushed as if it had been a crime, was so keen that, on leaving the banker's house, she had gladly availed herself of the first opportunity to leave André; for she was afraid that she might betray her disappointment. "To-morrow, when he comes to see me," she thought, "I shall be calmer—I shall have had time to reflect and to come to my senses."

The poor child had other troubles as well. She had decided not to return to her employer's shop on the Boulevard Magenta, for since her adventure at the Opéra Comique, she had taken a strong dislike to Madame Divet; moreover, her uncle had just ordered her to leave her employer. So it was necessary to apprise Madame Divet of all this without delay, and at the same time to try to find a situation in some other establishment.

Although it was Sunday, Babiolo was to go at five o'clock that afternoon to take the orders of one of Madame Divet's best customers—a wealthy and extravagant foreigner, who ordered a dozen bonnets at a time, and who, only the evening before, had had two dozen sent to her upon approval. This lady lived far up the Champs Elysées, and Babiolo had never yet seen her; for it was an apprentice who had delivered the bonnets at her house. Babiolo, who had entered the establishment in the capacity of errand-girl, had rapidly risen in rank, and now only waited upon such customers as were worth the trouble of pleasing at any cost. After all the day's excitement, she felt no inclination to return home; on the contrary, she longed to walk, to be in the open air, and mingle with a crowd of people, so as to try and drive away her melancholy thoughts. She was also glad to have this commission to fulfil, for, on announcing her intention of leaving, she wished to be able to prove to Madame Divet that she had faithfully served her interests up to the last moment.

Accordingly, she walked down the main boulevards towards the district where her employer's customer resided; and as she tripped along, she little imagined that André was on the point of starting in the same direction. The young fellow was not particularly pleased with Chantepie's advice, for the idea of calling on Madame Vernelle and threatening her was most distasteful to him. The whole scheme savoured strongly of blackmail, and any honourable man was bound to hesitate about adopting it. It was all very well for a person like Chantepie to manœuvre in this way. Why didn't he try the plan in person, himself—he, who was so well acquainted with the antecedents of this so-called Baroness d'Orbec? André had neglected to ask him, but it was very evident that Chantepie did not wish to

put himself forward, and it was not difficult to understand his motives for holding back, as he owed his position to Madame Vernelle.

However—distasteful as the cashier's plan was—André had promised Clémence to remove the obstacles that threatened to retard their marriage. She had authorized him to do so, and her father had given him *carte blanche*. André wished to marry before the end of the month, so he really had no alternative. He told himself that the end justified the means, and that to deliver a pure girl from a degraded mother, he might slightly deviate from the straight path, and endure some slight humiliation. While reasoning in this fashion, he, almost without knowing it, yielded to the desire which urged him to settle the matter as soon as possible, and walked on. It was not his will that directed his footsteps, but before he thought of stopping, he had nearly reached the end of the Avenue des Champs Elysées, along which Babiole had passed only a few moments before. A decision had now become absolutely necessary, and André felt strongly inclined to retrace his steps. But where should he go? and how should he employ his time? He was to dine with M. Vernelle the next day, but he had twenty-four hours before him, and he was in that state of mind when inaction seems intolerable. And what happiness it would be to be able to announce his complete success to Clémence and her father! Besides, what good would it do to defer the momentous step?

The more prompt his action was, the greater his chances of success would be, and nothing is so irksome as suspense. The longer he waited, the less power he would have over Madame Vernelle, who might speedily acquire a taste for the pleasures of Parisian life, and who was, perhaps even now, meditating some fresh escapade. Each day that passed would increase the scandal caused by her presence in the city where her husband and daughter resided. The prince might, moreover, become acquainted with the situation, and sever his connection with this woman. In such a case, she would have no motive for purchasing the silence of those she had dishonoured.

While André was still deliberating, he carelessly raised his eyes, and at the corner of a street near by, he read the name of the Rue Galilée. He took this for a favourable omen. It seemed to him that destiny had sent him to the house of the pretended baroness that very day and hour! and, without more ado, he walked towards her residence. He had not forgotten the number and he felt certain that this woman had returned from the Bois; for night was fast coming on, and but few vehicles were left in the main avenue. Quickening his pace, he soon reached a handsome building, which bore the number indicated by Chantepie. His ring at the door was promptly answered by a bright-eyed brunette, who was doubtless Madame Vernelle's maid. "Is the Baroness d'Orbec at home?" inquired André, and he at once received the customary response: "If monsieur will have the goodness to tell me his name—"

Thereupon André, who had not thought of inventing one, replied: "Will you inform Madame d'Orbec that I have called at the request of Monsieur Vernelle, to see her on important business?"

The maid scrutinised him with annoying persistency, as though she was asking herself if this unknown visitor was likely to please her mistress. The result of her examination was doubtless favourable to Subligny, for she said, with a smile: "I think the baroness will see you, sir. She is engaged, just now, with a milliner; but, for all that, I will deliver your message, and if I don't succeed, it won't be my fault."

So saying, she tripped lightly away, leaving Subligny, for a few moments, alone in an elegant hall, which strongly resembled a conservatory, so profusely was it adorned with flowers and choice exotics. As soon as the maid came back, she asked: "Is it on behalf of Monsieur Vernelle, the banker, that you have called?" And as she spoke she stealthily scrutinised the young secretary.

"Yes," replied André, "and the business that brings me, admits of no delay."

"Then please follow me, sir. Madame says that she has not the honour of Monsieur Vernelle's acquaintance, but that she will be very glad to see you on your own account."

"On my own account."

"I gave the baroness a description of you, sir. That decided her."

André frowned. It did not flatter him in the least to owe his admission to his good looks and the elegance of his attire. However, this was no time for delicate scruples. The matter in hand must be settled, then and there. The maid led the way, conducting him to the floor above by a winding staircase, decked with antique tapestry. They reached the landing, and after passing through two or three coquettishly furnished apartments, the maid opened the door of a small drawing-room, at the further end of which, in the brilliant light of a dozen candles, reflected by four Venetian mirrors, he perceived the spurious baroness seated upon a sofa, in front of a lacquer-table. He recognised her at a glance as the person he had seen at the Opéra Comique, on the night before. In front of her stood a young woman who was talking while she adjusted the trimmings of a bonnet she was holding. "I am at your service, sir," said the baroness, raising her voice, but speaking with the utmost suavity; and then turning to the young woman near her she exclaimed rather roughly. "I will keep this one, child, but you must take the other one back, and tell Madame Divet that it won't suit. It makes me look too old. With my complexion I have to wear delicate colours."

She had scarcely uttered these words when the maid reappeared, exclaiming: "Madame! the prince has come. His brougham has just stopped at the door."

This time André turned pale. Into what trap had he been lured? How was he to fulfil his mission, and how was he to beat a retreat? The idea of taking flight was most revolting to his pride, but if he remained what was he to do? However, the baroness received the announcement with unruffled calmness. It was evident that she was accustomed to such situations, and that the unexpected arrival of her lord and master did not in the least alarm her.

She rose, without any unseemly haste, made a sign to her maid—who instantly vanished—and then approached André. "Rosette did not flatter you in the least," she remarked, scrutinizing him with marvellous impudence.

It was with the utmost difficulty that André repressed the stinging retort that rose to his lips. "I cannot be mistaken," she continued. "You were at the Opéra Comique last night—alone in the box directly opposite me. You looked at me, and I looked at you. You did quite right to call, and I shall be very glad to have a chat with you. But, as you just heard, the prince is downstairs. Will you step into the next room? He won't remain long." So saying, she raised a silken door-hanging, and disclosed a smoking-room, fitted up in the Oriental style, and merely separated by the curtain from the apartment in which she was about to receive the prince.

This was going too far, and André was about to vent his anger, when the young girl who held the rejected bonnet turned round, and he recognised Babiole. His amazement was so great that he could not find a word to say, but allowed himself to be pushed into the smoking-room. Had Babiole recognised him? He trusted not, for he asked himself with no little anxiety what she would think of his visit to this pretended baroness. From the apartment in which he now found himself, he would hear every word spoken in the drawing-room. The situation exasperated him, and he was tempted to show himself—to throw the prince his card and leave the house with Babiole. But an instant's reflection made him change his mind. Clémence and her father relied upon him to deliver them from this creature. An open scandal would ruin their hopes and his. Besides, if war were once declared, the door of this house would never open for him again. So he decided to wait, and before he had time to regain his self-possession, the prince entered the drawing-room, saying: "Good-evening, Yolande. You were not expecting me, eh?" He spoke slowly, in that sing-song tone which the most cosmopolitan Russians find it difficult to lay aside.

"No, certainly not," replied the baroness, calmly. "I fancied you would dine at the club, so I made my arrangements accordingly."

"Oh, I don't blame you in the least. Besides, I do intend dining at the club, but it isn't seven o'clock yet, and I wish to have a little talk with you."

"Indeed! That doesn't often happen. What do you wish to consult me about?"

"Why, you are not alone! Who is this charming young person?" suddenly exclaimed the prince.

"Don't you see that it is a workwoman sent me by my milliner?"

"Your milliner certainly has good taste. Are you aware that you are positively bewitching, mademoiselle? I declare that I never saw such a pretty face as yours." This last remark was addressed to Babiole, and André did not lose a single word of it. "How old are you, mademoiselle?" continued the Russian.

"Sixteen and a half, sir," replied Babiole, without the slightest embarrassment.

"Say 'my prince,' child," cried the baroness.

"Don't frighten her, pray. I should be only too delighted if she wouldn't stand on ceremony with me," interrupted the prince. "In what establishment are you employed, mademoiselle?"

"How absurd you are, my dear Boris!" exclaimed the baroness. "Let the child alone. I will give you my milliner's address whenever you wish it. I'm not jealous."

"What am I to say to Madame Divet, madame?" inquired Babiole, coldly.

"Tell her to send me, instead of this fright of a bonnet, a pink or lila one, trimmed with flowers—something spring-like. You can go now. I have no further need of you."

"I am going, madame."

"Au revoir, mademoiselle," added the prince.

"Adieu, sir."

André did not see her leave the room, but he heard her proud replies, and thought: "The brave girl! She is poor; she is a child of the people, and yet she doesn't cringe in the presence of this rich adventuress or this titled libertine. And she is determined to defend herself. The fact that

she didn't tell them of her intention to leave Madame Divet's is proof that she did not want them to find her. But her unscrupulous employer is quite capable of giving them her address in the Rue Lamartine. They little dream that I will protect her against their desires."

Meanwhile, the baroness raised her silvery voice, saying: "You are incorrigible, my dear prince. It is time for a man to reform when he reaches the age of sixty."

"And for a woman when she arrives at the age of forty," sneered the prince.

"Was it to speak impertinently that you came here?"

"Hasn't Valdès been here to-day?"

"No, Valdès hasn't been here. Did you wish to see him?"

"Yes, I miss him very much—our excellent Valdès. He is so deferential to me, and he has so much wit. He repeats to me all the good things he has read in the newspapers. But, excuse my plain speaking, baroness, it seems to me our mutual friend is not looking well. I think a change would do him good. You, also, baroness, must find it rather disagreeable here. You ought to spend the winter in Italy—with Valdès."

"Is this an order or merely a bit of advice?" inquired the baroness, hastily.

"Merely a bit of advice," replied the prince, quietly. "I have no right to give you any orders."

"But you are master here, my dear Boris, and you have only to command to be promptly obeyed. However, if it is merely a piece of advice that you have just given me, I will frankly own that I haven't the slightest desire to shut myself up in Rome or Florence this winter."

"Not even at Monaco—you were formerly very fond of play?"

"Monaco would suit me very well, but I am not at all bored in Paris; oh! not in the least. In fact, I am enjoying myself immensely. I had been longing to return here for ten years past, and I certainly sha'n't take myself off on the morrow of my arrival."

"You will make a great mistake if you remain. Your husband will certainly meet you sooner or later."

"My husband? You must be dreaming! Many years have elapsed since I became a widow."

"So you have told me, but I have never had any proofs of it. I don't even know your unfortunate husband's name."

"You will jest on every occasion. The Baroness d'Orbec was necessarily the wife of Baron d'Orbec."

"I have mentioned this name once or twice at my club, and no one there had ever heard it before, although many of the members are thoroughly acquainted with the French nobility."

"Then you think I have invented this story, I suppose?"

"I have expressed no such opinion, but I should very much like to see your marriage certificate, as well as that of your husband's death."

"What for? You scarcely have any intention of marrying me."

"Ha, ha! who knows? I am growing old, as you reminded me just now. I am tired of the life I am leading, and I sometimes ask myself if I should not do as well to settle down in France, purchase a large estate one or two hundred miles from Paris, and end my days with you in the country. We could entertain all the gentry in the neighbourhood. It would amuse me vastly to see their wives paying their respects to you. We might take Valdès with us. It would be delightful!"

"Are you in earnest?"

"It is a plan that I submit to your approval. But in order to carry it into execution, I must of course be certain that you are a widow. If you are not, it would be no laughing matter. Bigamy is a serious offence."

"Which would carry us both before the assizes. Don't be alarmed, prince, I have no desire for such a fate. I will show you my marriage certificate, as well as a certificate of my husband's death; but you must give me time to procure them."

"Oh, I am in no particular hurry. I have no objections to remaining a couple of months longer in Paris."

"Ah, well, before that time is up, you shall have all the evidence you desire. I haven't much hope that you will marry me, but I am anxious to please you. I will at once write to my notary in the country, but legal formalities always require some time, and—"

"Oh, I will wait. I sincerely hope, however, that I shall be subjected to no annoyance on your account. I came to Paris to enjoy myself, and I don't at all wish to be involved in any scandal. There are newspapers here that make a speciality of spicy news, and I should be greatly enraged if I read some morning: 'Prince L—— was at the theatre last night with the Baroness d'Or——, a married woman with whose past career many of our readers are familiar.'"

"You have nothing of that kind to fear. Parisians have very short memories. No one here remembers me now. Besides, as I said before, in a few weeks I shall be able to convince you, beyond any possible doubt, that my husband isn't living."

"Try and do so as soon as possible. Time hangs rather heavily on my hands here, and I may take it into my head to leave at any time, unless the fancy I feel for this little *grisette* should detain me. She is really very pretty."

"Thanks," said the baroness, laughing.

"Oh! I intended no reflection upon you. We are little more than a pair of friend, remember, and, by the way, when you see this pretty milliner again, I should consider it a great favour if you would say a word or two on my behalf."

"As she seems a little shy, I think I had better send her employer to you."

"Thanks; however, you must excuse me if I leave you now. I won four thousand francs at *besique* yesterday, and I promised to give my adversary his revenge to-day before dinner. He is waiting for me at the club, so till we meet again. Don't forget those certificates."

The baroness rose to accompany the prince to the door, and while she was talking with him in the ante-room, André Subigny, concealed behind the silken curtain, indulged in some strange reflections. By a singular coincidence the prince had just broached the very subject which André himself wished to discuss with Clémence's mother. Madame d'Orbec was now prepared for the ultimatum he intended to submit to her, and he might reasonably hope that she would consent to it. Chantepie had told the truth. This Russian dreaded anything like a scandal, and perhaps he already had an inkling of the husband's existence, as he required the baroness to prove that she was a widow. She had just pledged herself to furnish him with satisfactory proofs within a brief delay; so she must feel certain that M. Vernelle would soon die. André recollected the attempt at poisoning, and asked himself, if this woman could have planned

the crime in order to be free to contract a second marriage. She did not allow him much time for reflection, however; for on taking leave of the prince she hastened back to release her prisoner.

"Come, sir," she said, lifting the door-hanging; "thank you for having waited so patiently. You must have been terribly bored, but I hope you bear me no ill-will. I could not turn the prince out of doors, and I thought you would not care to be presented to him."

"No, madame, I have no business with him," replied André curtly.

"I should think not," replied the baroness, simpering. "Well, we are alone, at last. Sit down, and let us talk."

She motioned André to a low chair near the sofa upon which she had just seated herself in a studied attitude, turning her back to the light, and presenting a three-quarter view of her face which lacked freshness, although her features were still handsome. As André looked at her, he was grieved to note that she strongly resembled Clémence.

"I noticed you last night at the theatre," the baroness began, "and I saw that you honoured me with a good deal of attention. I was greatly flattered by your notice, and I am delighted to see you again, although I do not know you at all. Audacity is very becoming in young men, I think, and your ardour pleases me. But how did you manage to learn my name and address so quickly? I resided in Paris a long time ago, but many years' absence have made me virtually a stranger here."

"Excuse me, madame," coldly replied Subigny, who had remained standing, "but your maid must have told you that I called at the request of Monsieur Vernelle."

"That, of course, was only an excuse for asking to see me. You mentioned the first name that occurred to you. It was very clever on your part; I like men of tact."

"You are greatly mistaken, madame. It was no invention. I am really sent by Monsieur Vernelle."

"I thought you said Corneille or Tournelle, and as I supposed you were only making use of some fictitious name, I paid no attention to it. But who is this Monsieur Vernelle?" continued the baroness with unblushing effrontery.

"Your husband, madame, as you know perfectly well."

The spurious baroness started, but she was not at all abashed. On the contrary, she replied, with a shrug of the shoulders: "What an absurd joke! I am a widow, sir, and you are not ignorant of the fact; for you must have listened to my conversation with the prince. Oh, I don't blame you. It was not of a private nature. Had I had anything to conceal from you, I should not have left you in the smoking-room."

"I heard the whole conversation, of course; but I repeat that I am speaking seriously. You were born in Normandy; your father was a Monsieur de Bacqueville, and about twenty years ago you married Monsieur Vernelle, the well-known banker. You see that I am well-informed respecting you."

This time the baroness changed countenance. Her eyes flashed, and she looked at André with a spiteful air. "Even supposing that all this be true, what is the object of your visit?" she asked. "In the first place, who are you?"

André was on the point of giving his name, but he recollected Chantepie's advice on the subject, so he contented himself with replying: "I am Monsieur Vernelle's private secretary."

"Oh, I begin to understand," responded the baroness scornfully. "I can even guess who gave you so much information. You think your employer is looking for me, that I am anxious to conceal my presence in Paris from him, and so you hope to make me purchase your silence. What price do you set upon it?"

André turned pale with anger, but remembering Clémence, he restrained himself. "Your husband was at the Opéra Comique last night," he replied. "He saw you enter a proscenium box, and he immediately left the theatre. This morning he charged me with a mission which I have come here to fulfil. I left him but a few moments ago, and I shall see him again to-morrow."

"What does he desire of me?"

"He wishes you to leave Paris immediately."

"And does he imagine I shall obey him?"

"He has means of compelling you to leave, and he will avail himself of it, if you refuse to go of your own accord."

"What means, pray?"

"He will institute proceedings against you and the prince. It will cost him much to resort to such extreme measures, but he will not shrink from them, I assure you. The prince will certainly have cause to regret the day he brought you here. In any case he will learn that you are a married woman, and you know what would be the consequences of such a revelation."

"But what if I should agree to go away?"

"In that case, Monsieur Vernelle will consent to ignore your existence, that is, providing you pledge yourself in writing never to set foot in France again; but if you fail to keep your promise, he will be at liberty to act as he sees fit, and, on the next occasion, he will show you no mercy. Now, will you accept your husband's conditions, yes or no? He wishes you to leave Paris immediately, and give your formal consent to the marriage of—"

"My daughter," interrupted Madame Vernelle.

"Then you have not forgotten that you have a daughter?" said Subigny, bitterly.

"No, sir, although she has forgotten her mother."

"You are no longer her mother," retorted André, bitterly.

"You are too young to criticise my actions, sir. You were but a child when I left the man whom I most unfortunately married, and whom I never loved. It is true that I have made no attempt to see my daughter since; but what would you have said of me had I acted otherwise? I preferred to let her believe that I was dead; and if Monsieur Vernelle has told her my story, he is very much to blame."

"He would have continued concealing it from her if you had not returned to Paris."

"My daughter would not know me if she saw me."

"You are very much mistaken. She was at the Opéra Comique last night with her father, and she recognised you at once; she now knows your real character."

"That is to say, she despises and denies me. I do not believe it; and I will prove to her that I have been basely slandered. I hate my husband, and I care nothing for his commands; if he provoked the scandal with which he threatens me, he would suffer far more than I should. However, I love my daughter, and I won't refuse to do anything she may wish. So if she desires it, I will leave Paris. You tell me also that she wishes to

marry. No doubt she knows that she cannot do so without her mother's consent. Well, I will grant it. But whom is she going to marry?"

"I am not authorised to tell you."

"I must know, nevertheless, before I can give my consent."

"There is nothing to prevent you from giving a written consent without mentioning the name of the person she is to marry."

"And you imagine that will suffice? It is very evident that you never studied law."

"No, madame; but—"

"Well, I can tell you something which you seem to be ignorant of. There are two ways for a mother to authorise her daughter's marriage. The first, and the one most in vogue, is to accompany her to the mayor's office."

"Never!"

"I understand. My daughter would blush for me. Well, I will not inflict this humiliation upon her. The other plan is for the mother to give her consent in a document drawn up by a notary, and signed in his presence. I have reason to know something on this subject. My father was opposed to my marriage, and refused to be present at it, so he went to England, and there signed the consent that his notary sent him from France. There is nothing to prevent me from doing as my father did."

"That is all that Monsieur Vernelle asks."

"Don't speak of him. Speak of Clémence. She is very charming, is she not? I hope she loves the man she is going to marry."

"She loves him, and he loves her."

The baroness looked André straight in the eyes. "And you are the man?" she said.

"Yes, madame, I am," replied André, without the least hesitation.

"I am glad to hear it. She, at least, will be happy. I wouldn't have allowed her father to marry her to any one against her will; but I am amazed that he has chosen you, for he likes men of his own stamp, and he is so avaricious that he wouldn't give his daughter to anyone in petty circumstances. So I suppose you are rich."

"No, madame, I have nothing in the world."

"Then Monsieur Vernelle must have greatly changed. In fact, I hear that he is in very bad health."

"Who told you so?"

"Some one who knows. He has not two months to live, I am told."

"Is that the reason why you just promised the prince the certificate of your husband's death?" exclaimed Subigny. "You are very much mistaken. Monsieur Vernelle won't die. He has been very ill, it is true; but he has discovered the cause of his illness, and his recovery is certain."

"A long life to him! I don't wish for his death. It was his cashier who informed me that his health was failing every day."

"Chantepie! Have you seen him?"

"No; he wrote to me. He has not forgotten that he owes his position to me, and he has kept up a correspondence with me—unknown to his employer. I do wrong to tell you this, for now it is in your power to have him dismissed. I should add, however, that he gave me no intimation of my daughter's intended marriage. He is probably ignorant of it. I must ask him to call on me."

"Then you intend to prolong your sojourn in Paris? I warn you that Monsieur Vernelle won't modify his decision."

"He will at least grant me a respite of forty-eight hours?"

"Forty-eight hours, but no more."

"Are you in such a great hurry to get married?" inquired the baroness ironically.

"I wish the wedding to take place before the end of the present month," replied André. "I know, of course, that it is in your power to delay its celebration by refusing your consent. If you do withhold it, two years must elapse before Mademoiselle Vernelle can dispense with it. In that case, we will wait; and when the time for the marriage comes, there will be no further need of secrecy, for you will have been publicly convicted and condemned."

This was said in a tone which convinced Madame Vernelle there was nothing left for her but submission. However, she wished to explain why she submitted. "I love my daughter, and nothing could induce me to cause her any sorrow," she said. "It isn't difficult for me to believe that she loves you; and I would not mar her happiness. But I wish her to distinctly understand that I am not influenced by her father's threats, but that I make the sacrifice solely for her sake. I will leave Paris for Monaco on the day after to-morrow, and I shall afterwards repair to Italy. As for the promise never to return to France, it is useless for me to make it. If I should return, my husband would hear of it, and he could then enter a complaint against me. As long as he lives I shall not expose myself to his vengeance which would cost my daughter—and you—so dear."

"And before you go you will sign the consent?"

"No, sir. I will not disclose my real name to any Paris lawyer. You can understand why. Monsieur Vernelle can choose his notary, and explain my absence to him as he sees fit; I leave him the task of inventing a plausible story. Let him say, if he chooses, that by reason of an accident I am unable to make a long journey to be present at my daughter's marriage. This notary, having no interest in making difficulties, will be content with his client's assertion, and will at once draw up the required document, and forward it to one of his colleagues at Monaco for me to sign it. The mayor who marries you will require nothing more. Nor will you, I suppose?" added Madame Vernelle, with a questioning look.

"I think Monsieur Vernelle will be satisfied with your promise," replied André, after a moment's hesitation; "but if you fail to keep it—"

"He will prosecute me, eh? He would have no more pity on his daughter than on me. He would take proceedings also against the prince, who would be furious with me on account of the scandal, and, who, if he learnt that I am not a widow would immediately break with me. An anonymous letter would do the work effectually."

"If he receives one, it will certainly not come either from Monsieur Vernelle or myself," Subigny quickly rejoined.

"Or from my daughter, I hope."

"Mademoiselle Vernelle knows nothing at all about your present life."

"She knows that I am here, as she saw me at the Opéra Comique last night; but I can forgive her for feeling very little interest in her mother. She is not her own mistress, and she will not be free to follow the dictates of her heart as long as she remains under her father's authority. But her feelings will change by-and-bye."

"I think not," replied André, in sullen wrath; "and I advise you not to rely upon the widowhood which you promised to prove conclusively

within a stated time. I heard you pledge yourself to show the prince the certificate of your husband's death in less than two months."

"Very well; then I sha'n't show it to him, that is all. It was a whim that suddenly seized hold of him. When once I am out of Paris he will forget all about it. Chantepie misled me by writing me that his employer could not live six weeks longer. I can see very plainly that you don't like Chantepie. You are perfectly right. You perceive that I am frank with you. Chantepie certainly rendered me very valuable services many years ago; but I can not say that I have much confidence in him. And as a proof that I bear you no ill-will, I advise you to be on your guard, and not to place too much confidence in that man. He took my part years ago, but I think him quite capable of serving two masters, for in reality, he only thinks of himself. He is very ambitious, and of a more vindictive disposition than you would probably suppose. I should no doubt astonish you very much if I told you why he hates my husband and daughter so bitterly."

"Hates them!" replied Subigny. "Why, I thought he was devoted to Monsieur Vernelle; and I was not aware that he had ever bestowed a thought upon Mademoiselle Clémence. What have they done for him to hate them?"

"Nothing. The facts are simply these: I interested myself in Chantepie's behalf because I believed he was devoted to me. He had learned a secret of mine, and he kept it faithfully. Indeed, as far as I know, he has kept it even up to the present time. But he had no sooner entered the house, than the idea of becoming my husband's partner and marrying Clémence occurred to him. Pray note, that Clémence was only nine years old at the time. But Chantepie is a wily and patient fellow. He disclosed his plans to me, and at the very first allusion to his hopes I laughed in his face; but, unfortunately, I had my reasons for not wishing to quarrel with him just then, and shortly afterwards I left my husband and France. I knew very well that Clémence would snub Chantepie as he deserved; so, as I was anxious to have news of her, I allowed him to write to me. He availed himself of the permission to such an extent, that during the last ten years I have received a letter from him every month. In the latter ones, he displayed any amount of rancour, which was easily accounted for, as in his earlier notes he had not concealed from me that my husband kept him at a distance, and that Clémence shewed a decided aversion to him. I did not see or hear anything, of course, for I was not on the spot; but I am almost sure that he must have made overtures to Monsieur Vernelle—overtures which were summarily rejected; and I shouldn't be in the least surprised if he had ventured to make a declaration of love to my daughter. In any case, he hates her and her father. He thirsts for revenge, there isn't the slightest doubt of it, though I can't tell what he hopes to gain by vengeance, or how he means to act. It is certain, however, that he has already set to work, for my return to France was in a great measure due to him. I had long desired to return, but hesitated—I feared to injure my daughter by my presence—you may believe me or not as you like. It was Chantepie, however, who wrote to me quite recently that no one in Paris remembered me, and that Monsieur Vernelle would never meet me, as he only visited a few friends who had never known me, and who never associated with foreigners. I am now satisfied, however, that, in enticing me here, Chantepie had no other object than to humiliate Clémence, and make my husband suffer. But

he won't be content with that. He must be preparing some more cruel revenge."

"And yet you remain on intimate terms with him?"

"Intimate is hardly the word. Since my arrival he has written to me twice to apologise for not coming to see me. He declared that my husband was very ill, that his life, in fact, was in danger, and that he, as the cashier of the house, could not absent himself while his employer was unable to attend to business."

"Has he also told you that Monsieur Vernelle is ruined, or well-nigh ruined?"

"Good heavens! My daughter will have no dowry, then?"

"It is for that very reason that I am going to marry her."

"You should have told me that in the first place, sir. If you had done so, I should immediately have given you my consent." Then seeing the expression of astonishment, even incredulity, on André's face: "I see that you do not understand women," she continued. "Because I brave public opinion, and ignore many social prejudices, you think that I have no heart. Because I voluntarily parted from my daughter, you believed that I no longer love her. You are very much mistaken, sir. I am ready to do anything to spare her pain. The only really hard sacrifice is that of foregoing the happiness of witnessing her marriage. However, I will not raise any obstacles. I shall leave at once for Monte Carlo, where I shall stay at the Grand Hotel, and when my husband's notary has drawn up the necessary document, and sent it to his Monaco colleague, I will explain and prove to the latter that my maiden name was De Bacqueville, and that I am married to Monsieur Vernelle. I will sign the document in the notary's presence, and it shall be returned to you by the next mail. Farewell, sir. I will detain you no longer."

André bowed, and was about to withdraw without another word, when she said to him, with an emotion which was probably sincere:

"Swear to me that you love her, and that she loves you!"

"I swear it, madame," replied André, touched in spite of himself.

"That is well, never speak to her of me, and make her happy."

André did not reply, but immediately left the room, heaving a sigh of relief. The strange scene had bewildered him. All manner of ideas flashed through his mind. This degraded mother horrified him, and yet he could not help pitying her. Her cynicism, in the early part of their interview, had been most revolting; but the noble sentiments she had expressed at its close, had touched him. He could not understand this want of harmony between heart and conduct. He had not lived long enough to know that inconsistency is one of women's chief characteristics, and that degradation does not destroy maternal love. "Her husband judged her aright," he murmured, as he descended the stairs; "she is virtually unconscious of what she does. I am sure that her emotion wasn't feigned, and that, at this moment, she is ready to make any sacrifice to spare her daughter pain. If she were now asked to retire into a convent, she would do so; but by to-morrow all these generous resolutions will be forgotten. She will resume her old life, and everything will go on as before. I did wrong not to demand a written promise. But no—she will leave Paris, if only to please the Russian prince, who seems very anxious to get rid of her. To what depths of degradation has the poor creature fallen! Clémence has no idea of it, and I hope she never will! I certainly have no intention of telling her, either before or after our marriage. I have

secured all that Monsieur Vernelle desired—her immediate departure and consent. The idea of having the latter signed in the presence of a notary at Monaco is a good one. Strange to say, it originated with her. Heaven grant she may not change her mind !”

He left the house sick at heart. He longed to breathe the fresh air, recover his self-possession, and calmly consider the change in the situation which this interview had just brought about. Reaching the Champs Elysées, he walked along towards the *Place de la Concorde*, without knowing exactly where he was going, or how he should spend his evening. M. Vernelle had given him leave of absence until dinner-time the next day. This was equivalent to stating that he wished to be left alone with his daughter for the next twenty-four hours, and André dared not intrude upon him before the appointed time. Babiole, on her side, had made an engagement with him for the following morning, and no doubt she had good reasons for not asking him to call earlier. Determined to comply with both requests, André found himself, in the meantime, condemned to inaction, whereat he was greatly annoyed, for he particularly wished to confer with his prospective father-in-law, as well as with the pretty milliner of the *Rue Lamartine*. It was on the one hand of the utmost importance that Vernelle should be informed of his wife's decision, so that he might at once request some notary to draw up the document which was to be sent to Monaco. It was also equally important that Babiole should be warned of the danger that threatened her. She had no doubt noticed that the prince had taken a great fancy to her, but she had not heard the conversation which had taken place between him and Madame d'Orbec after her departure ; and André felt that he had not a moment to lose if he was to defeat the purpose of those who were conspiring against her.

However, after all, his mind was mainly occupied with Chantepie, who now appeared to him in a new character. The cashier was evidently a scoundrel ; Madame Vernelle's revelations had settled that point beyond doubt ; but the most important fact that she had communicated was that Chantepie hated the banker, whose bread he ate, and also Mademoiselle Vernelle. He had sworn to be avenged upon them for their disdain ; and his every act must tend to the furtherance of his purpose. Why, then, was he working so zealously, trying to bring about Subigny's marriage ? Clémence loved André ; and M. Vernelle wished to see them united ; yet Chantepie, who execrated both the father and the daughter, was doing his best to insure the success of their most cherished plans. It seemed, really, incomprehensible. Evidently enough all this concealed mystery must be cleared up ; but though André concentrated his attention upon the problem, he did not succeed in solving it. He carefully reviewed the facts, but he could not discover Chantepie's object in promoting the marriage. The cashier could not be actuated by a desire to obtain his money, for he now knew perfectly well that Vernelle was a ruined man, and that his daughter would not have a penny. Nor could he be acting out of friendship for André, for the manner in which he had reminded the young secretary of his liabilities only a few hours before, showed conclusively that he had no real liking for him, and could only have been actuated by self-interest in rendering him such an important service. No doubt he wished to bind André to him by links of gratitude, in order to have him completely under his control, and make him the docile instrument of his secret plans.

Now, the first use he had made of his power, had been to advise, or

rather command, André to marry Mademoiselle Vernelle as soon as possible. Could he, then, expect that this marriage would bring misery upon Clémence, whom he hated so bitterly for having scorned his own pretensions? He knew, however, that the two young persons he was trying to unite loved each other. He knew, also, that Subigny was intelligent, clever and industrious, and that he would be sure to succeed in life and keep his wife from want.

The explanation of the riddle might be found, perhaps, in some secret with which André was not acquainted, but which Madame Vernelle probably knew perfectly well. She had, indeed, admitted to Subigny that Chantepie had, in former years, discovered a secret which had placed her completely in his power, but which he had faithfully kept up to the present time; André, not attaching much importance to the information at the moment, had not urged her to explain herself further. However, no matter what was the nature of this secret, Chantepie had certainly made use of it to compel the erring wife to obtain him a situation as cashier in her husband's bank, and he had retained the position thus secured by threatening her with exposure.

He had probably been aware of one of her earlier intrigues; but after the scandal caused by her flight, she had nothing to lose, and could afford to laugh at his menaces. Thereupon he had changed his tactics, becoming her correspondent and spy, keeping her fully informed respecting everything that occurred in M. Vernelle's household, and finally urging her to return to Paris. Now, as Chantepie never did anything without hoping to reap advantage from it, his change of conduct evidently had a motive, which, it might be, was connected with some Machiavellian scheme against Vernelle and his daughter. What scheme this was, André had no idea; still, one fact was proved beyond doubt: Chantepie was, as Babiole had asserted, a bad man, a scoundrel not unlike the hero of one of Eugène Sue's romances—Atar-Gull, the negro slave, who tortures his master while pretending to serve him with boundless devotion, and who finds a way to gratify his implacable hatred while posing as a model of virtue.

Chantepie had undoubtedly lured Madame Vernelle to Paris for the sake of his revenge; and he might even now be trying to complete his work. But how is one to fight a concealed enemy? Soldiers in battle are frequently struck by shells fired from cannons which they cannot see; and André found himself in a similar predicament; but he finally came to the conclusion that Chantepie would have to show his hand sooner or later, and that it then would be time enough to retaliate upon him. For the moment, Chantepie seemed inclined to retire from the field, for he had resigned his position as cashier; and his resignation would sever his connection with the banker, and put an end to his visits to the house; hence, his perfidious dealings were no longer to be dreaded.

The attempts to poison the banker, which might reasonably be attributed to him, were still unexplained. The scamp was certainly capable of trying to rid the baroness of her husband in this way, though he had probably attempted it without consulting her; for, so far as Subigny could judge, she was not the woman to connive at such a cowardly crime. Fortunately, the attempt had not proved successful; due warning had been given. M. Vernelle would not continue taking the bromide, and his daughter would certainly watch over his safety. The rest was the business of Dr. Valbrègue and the police, providing the former deemed it advisable to institute an investigation. It devolved upon them to question the druggist who had

made up the prescription, and to ascertain through whose hands the medicine had passed before it reached the banker's house, and even afterwards. As for André, he had no desire to become mixed up in this affair. He certainly had plenty of other matters on his hands.

The Avenue des Champs Elysées is long, and before the young fellow reached the Place de la Concorde, he had considerable time for reflection ; but he was not much the wiser for it, as he had not decided upon any plan of action, or even how he should spend his evening. The simplest plan would be to dine at the nearest restaurant, and then return home and go to bed, in view of mustering strength for the next day, which threatened to be an exciting one. He usually took his meals at a little restaurant near his rooms ; but he sometimes met other employés of the bank there, and was obliged to talk to them for fear of being considered proud. They would now certainly question him respecting M. Vernelle's financial embarrassments, and as André by no means cared to tell them the truth, he felt anxious to avoid them. As he walked up the Rue Royale towards the Madeleine, he espied an English tavern, bearing as a sign the inscription, "His Lordship's Larder." More beer than wine was consumed there, and boiled cabbage was in greater demand than truffles ; however, André was not a gourmand, and, besides, he hoped he should there find what he most desired : solitude. He went in, seated himself with his back to the door, and ordered a very plain dinner which he soon dispatched. At his age worry does not take away one's appetite. He had reached his dessert, that is to say, the cheese, for he seldom indulged in dainties, when the sound of conversation behind him suddenly attracted his attention. The weather was so mild that the landlord had opened the windows, so that inside the establishment one could readily overhear what passed in the street. Two passers-by had just seated themselves at one of the little tables set out in front of the tavern, and as their backs were turned to André, they could not see him or *vice-versâ*. "So you have left?" said one of the newcomers. "What kind of a face did he make when you tendered your resignation?"

"He showed no surprise," replied the other. "I think he must have expected it. He is irretrievably ruined. He can never recover from the blow."

"We shall neither of us shed many tears about it. We have got all we can out of him, and we can now start a business of our own, which will be more prosperous than his ever was. I suppose you still hold to our going into partnership?"

"More than ever ; I think it would be advisable not to begin operations until after the fifteenth. I want to finish with this man first."

"But he is effectually done for. When he has discharged his liabilities, he won't have a copper left."

"That is not enough for me. I want him to die of grief—he and his daughter too. I have reasons for wishing that, and the mine I've laid will blow up one of these days. However, I must have time to fire it."

"Go a-head, my dear fellow, I won't interfere with you, though I have no particular grudge against them. It is the little secretary I hate. I would willingly give ten thousand francs for an opportunity to get even with him, for he robbed me of a very pretty girl the other evening, and insulted me into the bargain."

"I have something in reserve for him that he will remember, never fear, and it will cost you nothing, old fellow."

"If you will punish him, Chantepie, I shall be your debtor for life. Is what you told me this evening true? I mean that he is going to marry the daughter, all the same?"

"I hope and believe so."

"But what do you mean to do?"

"Never mind, Bertaud. I know what I am about, and you will see by-and-bye."

"I ask nothing better. Still, I feel awfully riled when I think how that little milliner foiled me. I must try to get hold of her again. I'll go and see her employer, Madame Divet, to-morrow. She is a woman of infinite resources."

"She'll arrange matters all right. But, come, let us be off. The baroness dines at eight o'clock, and I want to introduce you to her to-day."

The two scoundrels walked quietly away, and André, who had heard the whole conversation, although it was carried on in an undertone, took good care not to turn while Chantepie was settling for the glasses of beer which he and Bertaud had drunk.

André now knew beyond any possible doubt that they had leagued themselves together to defraud and ruin M. Vernelle, and that the cashier was reserving some terrible surprise for his wedding day, but he could not imagine what it was. "He perhaps intends to produce the receipt I signed, or else to give Clémence the letter he took from my table, the letter in which I confessed that I was a thief. Ah! well, I shall confess the truth to my wife, and she will forgive me."

VIII.

WHEN Babiole hurriedly took leave of André at the door of the banker's residence in the Rue Bergère, she had told him she should be at home all day on the morrow, but she afterwards regretted having said so, as she was anxious to go to the shop and inform Madame Divet that she was about to leave her. After the Opéra Comique scene, Babiole had resolved to sever her connection with that unprincipled woman, and her uncle's approval and the incidents that had occurred at the baroness's residence had only strengthened her previous determination. She was not so unsophisticated as to be blind to the Russian prince's admiration, and to his very evident desire to see her again; and so feeling satisfied that her employer would not hesitate to serve as his intermediary, she wished to escape from her authority without delay. On the other hand, however, she was anxious not to miss André's visit. Still she hoped that he would call early in the morning; but when ten o'clock came, and he had failed to make his appearance, she began to fear that he did not intend to keep his promise, and asked herself if it would not be as well for her to go to the Boulevard Magenta. She at last decided to wait a little while longer, for she particularly desired to have an explanation with M. Subligny, though she knew that the interview would be a painful, and, most probably, a final one; for she had no intention of accepting the friendly overtures of Mademoiselle Vernelle, who had invited her to repeat her visit, and even to attend the wedding.

Babiole had recognised André perfectly when she met him at the Baroness d'Orbec's. She had seen him conceal himself in the smoking-room, and she did not know what to think of him, for his presence in such

company seemed to her inexcusable. She naturally had no intention of reproaching him for his conduct; that was Mademoiselle Vernelle's business, supposing anything were amiss, but she was extremely anxious to tell him all she knew about Marbeuf. She felt that she had no right to prolong her old neighbour's captivity at the hospital, but from a fear of doing him an injury it was necessary, first of all, to reveal his whereabouts to André Subigny. The latter, who must know the truth concerning Marbeuf, would decide whether it was better to let him remain a nameless patient in the Necker Hospital, or to secure his release by revealing his name and relating his history to Dr. Valbrègue. "I will tell Monsieur André everything," thought Babiole, "and then try to forget everything and everybody connected with the affair, even him."

But it would prove a difficult task; and in her secret heart poor Babiole had little hope of success, still she wished to put an end to an equivocal situation. At half-past ten, just as she was closing the window she had opened, in order to hang out her goldfinch's cage, there came a knock at the door. She ran to open it. The visitor was André. "You are just in time," she remarked rather coldly. "I was about going out."

"You appointed no hour," replied the young man, "and I feared I might inconvenience you if I came early."

"Oh, I am always up by daybreak; but that is not at all strange, as I generally go to bed with the chickens. To-day, however, I might have played the sluggard, for I am not going to the shop. But come in, and let us talk. I sha'n't offer to show you my apartments. They are not worth it."

"They remind me of the inestimable service you rendered me, however. Here is the window you were looking through when you saw me take poor Marbeuf's revolver from the wall. Had it not been for you, I should have died by my own hand."

"Even human weaknesses sometimes work for good. Had I not been naturally inquisitive, I shouldn't have looked out, and you would, perhaps, have destroyed yourself. Still, I can't imagine why you wanted to commit suicide. I never asked you, I think."

"I should hardly have known what to tell you, if you had. A great disappointment—I am very excitable, I lost my head, and—"

"And now that you have become so happy, you have no desire to repeat the experiment."

"No, I assure you; though the happiness you speak of is not unalloyed, by any means."

"What more do you wish? Your marriage is decided upon, and the young lady you are to marry is very charming. When will the wedding take place?"

"In about ten days' time, if nothing happens amiss; but perhaps something may occur to defer it."

"You haven't changed your mind, I suppose. I was present at your betrothal. A promise of marriage is sacred."

"I know it. Why do you suppose that I don't intend to keep mine?"

"Why? Because I saw you last evening at the house of a person who can hardly wish you to marry."

"You recognised me, then?"

"Of course. As I said before, the lady seemed inclined to keep you to herself, and you, yourself, did not seem to be averse to such an arrangement, as you concealed yourself in the smoking-room."

André blushed to his very ears. It seemed to him that he might have been spared this new perplexity. Babiole evidently thought that he was Madame d'Orbec's lover. How could he deceive her without betraying a family secret, without confessing that the so-called baroness was Clémence's mother, and M. Vernelle's lawful wife? "Mademoiselle," he at last said, "I assure you upon my honour as a gentleman, that I entered that house in the Rue Galilée for the first time yesterday, and that I had never before set eyes on the person who received me. Besides, she will leave Paris to-morrow, never to return. I also assure you that my object in calling upon her was a most laudable one. You won't doubt this, when I tell you that Monsieur Vernelle and his daughter not only authorised me, but begged of me to go there. I can say no more just now, but later on, perhaps, you will learn the truth, if we remain friends, as I sincerely hope we shall."

"I believe you, sir."

"I thank you for not doubting my word, and to convince you that there is nothing between this Baroness d'Orbec and myself, I will tell you what I overheard after your departure."

"Oh! I need no proofs."

"But you were the subject of the conversation, mademoiselle. This baroness is a most unscrupulous woman, as you must have suspected, and after you had left, she promised the Russian prince, who paid you so many compliments, to give him the address of your employer, who, so she assured him, would gladly speak to you in his favour. It was my duty to warn you of this. I have done so; and I also beg that you will rely upon my help, if necessary, at any time."

"I expected no less of you, but I sha'n't require assistance. I can protect myself. All the princes in the world couldn't frighten me. I shall dispose of this one as I disposed of Monsieur Bertaud. As for my employer, I intend to leave her establishment to-day, as I informed you yesterday, before I left you to Monsieur Chantepie's tender mercies."

"However, she may give your address to the prince, who will send emissaries to you. I think him even capable of presenting himself in person."

"It would be the first time a prince ever climbed to my garret," laughed Babiole. "He would certainly have a hard time of it—four flights—seventy-two stairs to climb—and he would not be admitted even when he got here. Besides, if all these persons try to persecute me, I shall move, and go and live in the same house as my uncle. However, in the meantime, I am not in the least afraid of them, I assure you. But, speaking of my uncle, it was by going to see him that I discovered Monsieur Marbeuf."

"Marbeuf!" exclaimed Subigny. "What! was it your uncle who found him?"

"No, my uncle is in a hospital, and he knew nothing whatever about my unfortunate neighbour."

"How, then, did you happen to discover Marbeuf's whereabouts?"

"Well, my uncle is in the Saint Ferdinand Ward of the Necker Hospital and his bed is Number Twenty. The one opposite, Number Nineteen, is occupied by Monsieur Marbeuf, and yesterday being visiting-day—on going to the hospital—"

"You saw Marbeuf?"

"Yes. I recognised him at the first glance. He hasn't changed at all, except that he is a trifle thinner."

"And you spoke to him? You asked him—"

"I did nothing of the kind. He either didn't recognise me, or pretended not to recognise me. I believe, however, that he has lost his memory entirely."

"You say he is at the Necker Hospital? Why, then his must be the extraordinary case that Dr. Valbrègue was telling us about, on the day before yesterday, at Monsieur Vernelle's!"

"Probably it is, as your friend is under Dr. Valbrègue's charge."

"And has been for about a month, has he not?"

"A little over a month, judging from what I heard. He was picked up in the street, and carried to the hospital in a state of insensibility. Since he has recovered consciousness, he can remember nothing, not even his name, or the accident that reduced him to this condition. He has no more memory than if he had been born only yesterday; at least so he pretends."

"What do you mean by that? Do you think he is only feigning a loss of memory?"

"I know nothing at all about it; but my uncle fancies that such is the case."

"But what possible object could he have?"

"I don't know, and that is why I said nothing."

"Then no one at the hospital has any suspicion who he is?"

"My uncle knows. I told him, but made him promise to be silent on the subject until my next visit, on Thursday. I didn't like to tell what I knew, until I had consulted you, though one of the assistant doctors plied me with questions."

"I don't clearly understand the reason of your silence. Marbeuf must be very miserable in the hospital."

"But he would be far more wretched in prison."

"In prison!" exclaimed Subigny. "What do you mean? Why should he be sent to prison?"

"It is I who ought to ask that question. You are probably well acquainted with your friend's affairs, and know his reasons for concealing his name much better than I do."

André started. The idea suggested by Babiole had not occurred to him before, but it now made a deep impression upon his mind.

"I would tell you what my uncle said, if I dared," continued the girl.

"What is there to prevent your telling it? I am very anxious to obtain all possible information on the subject."

"Ah, well, he is of the opinion that Monsieur Marbeuf has stolen some money, and that being unable to replace it, and knowing that he would be ruined if the theft were discovered, he is endeavouring to conceal his identity."

"But he certainly couldn't have invented the accident, and you say he was picked up on the street in an insensible condition. Besides, what has he to hope for? The doctors won't keep him in the hospital indefinitely."

"No. There is already some talk of sending him to a lunatic asylum, I believe."

"In that case, he must indeed be mad to persist in concealing his identity. So your uncle's supposition—"

"Is absurd. I hope so; and I should perhaps agree with you if I did not remember what occurred here on the night of Monsieur Marbeuf's disappearance. Disappearance is really the word, for after that night no one was able to learn anything about his whereabouts—"

"I remember the matter, of course, but for all that, I fail to see—"

"Well, that evening when you came to my assistance in the street, you had just left Monsieur Marbeuf, had you not?"

"Yes, we had dined together, and separated on leaving the restaurant."

"But he was to return home in the course of the evening. You confidently expected that, didn't you?"

"Yes. In fact, I thought he would soon join me."

"And at midnight you were still waiting for him, and his prolonged absence so disturbed you that you were finally overcome with despair?"

"That is true. I feared that some misfortune had befallen him, and my presentiments did not deceive me, it seems."

"Be frank with me. It wasn't this fear alone that made you take up a revolver with the intention of blowing your brains out. A man doesn't kill himself because he is anxious about the fate of a friend." André did not know how to answer this reasoning of a girl of sixteen; besides, in trying to convince him, Babiole had suggested several new theories. "You resolved to die," she continued, "because you did not receive some reply he was to bring you, and you said to yourself, 'No news is bad news'—the exact opposite of the proverb."

"What do you know of that?" muttered André, astonished at so much shrewdness.

"I may not have guessed exactly right," replied Babiole, "but I certainly am not far from the truth. Perhaps you had intrusted a large sum of money to your friend's keeping—"

This time André turned as pale as death. "You know very well that I was even poorer, then, than I am at present," he stammered. "Besides, even if I had intrusted a fortune to Marbeuf, the idea of his stealing it would never have occurred to me."

"But you might have feared he had lost it. Pray believe me, Monsieur André, I am not trying to pry into your secrets. It is the last time I shall say anything to you about Monsieur Marbeuf; but if I could have had my way, I should have spoken to you about him much sooner. Yesterday, on leaving the hospital, my first impulse was to go and find you. I did not know your address, and I had great difficulty in finding you. When I did, I could not explain matters in presence of Monsieur Vernelle. I was afraid I might annoy you if I told this story in the presence of your future father-in-law."

"I am extremely grateful to you for your thoughtfulness."

"Then, when we left the house, the unexpected apparition of Monsieur Chantepie put me to flight. Besides, I relied upon seeing you this morning. Well, here you are, and now it is for you to decide what ought to be done respecting Monsieur Marbeuf. I could not assume the responsibility of revealing his identity. The comparative isolation in which I live, has taught me to be prudent, so I said nothing, not wishing to have any cause to reproach myself for having injured your friend—or yourself."

André could but admire the good sense and rare presence of mind which Babiole had displayed. He felt that she had done right in reporting the facts to him without delay, but, for all that, he was greatly perplexed. His heart revolted at the thought of leaving Marbeuf in his present deplorable position, and his first impulse was to hasten to the hospital, call his friend by name, and bring him to the Rue Lamartine immediately. But would Marbeuf recognise him, and if he did, what explanation could he give? Everything seemed to indicate that he had been attacked and

left for dead after the package of bank-notes had been stolen from him. But where had the poor fellow been thus attacked and plundered? Such an assault could hardly have occurred in the Rue Bergère at eight o'clock in the evening. It was possible, of course, that in his search for Monsieur Vernelle he might have been enticed into some gambling-den; or that, on his way to some railway station, he had fallen into the clutches of some of the thieves who prowl about the outlying quarters of Paris; but in that case, what possible interest could he now have in concealing his name and antecedents? It soon occurred to André that the story of the hundred thousand francs was only known to Chantepie and himself, and that Chantepie was certainly ignorant of the fact that Marbeuf had been in the Necker Hospital for more than a month: had he known it, he would certainly have warned his debtor and have urged him to take proceedings against Marbeuf.

The consequences of this strange discovery, therefore, depended entirely upon André. He had only to remain silent, after taking Marbeuf home. Babiola had just given conclusive evidence of her ability to keep a secret; and Dr. Valbrègue, who was merely interested in the case from a medical point of view, certainly would not trouble about the facts that had preceded it, but would content himself with watching his patient's gradual recovery.

"I understand your scruples, mademoiselle," said André, at last; "and I will assume the whole responsibility of the affair. Marbeuf has no cause to reproach himself, I am sure; and I will not let him remain in the hospital an hour longer than is absolutely necessary. You said bed Number Nineteen, in the Saint Ferdinand Ward, did you not?"

"Yes; but this is not visitors' day, so you will be refused admission."

"I shall apply to Dr. Valbrègue. He will grant me a permit."

"But you won't find him at the hospital. The hour for his round has passed by. He is only there in the morning, from nine till ten."

"But some of the hospital officials must be there."

"Yes; the assistant doctor that I saw, probably. Perhaps by telling him the object of your visit you could obtain a pass."

"I am sure of it."

"In fact, I shouldn't be surprised if he offered to accompany you to the patient's bedside, for he seems very anxious to establish Monsieur Marbeuf's identity. Still I don't believe that he will allow you to take your friend away with you. He will want to consult his superiors first."

"All the same, I shall try, and if I don't succeed, I shall endeavour to find Dr. Valbrègue."

"Have you thought of the sensation which Monsieur Marbeuf's unexpected return will create in the house? Our doorkeeper is convinced that he is dead, and she will take him for a ghost."

"That makes no difference to me."

"Yes, but she may go and inform the commissary of police."

"And why? Hasn't a tenant a right to absent himself if he chooses?"

"No doubt, but Monsieur Marbeuf disappeared very suddenly, and nothing has been heard of him for more than a month, so that government seals have been affixed to the doors of his apartment."

"But his furniture is still there."

"Yes; but it was to have been sold on the fifteenth of April."

"Ah, well, it won't be sold. Marbeuf will only have to report himself to the commissary to prevent that. He will have no difficulty in proving

that he is alive. In two hours' time from now I will have him here. Shall I find you at home on my return?"

"Certainly. The Boulevard Magenta isn't far off, and my interview with my employer won't be a lengthy one, so I shall soon be back again—and I won't go out afterwards. So it is settled," added Babiole. "You are going to claim your friend. Heaven grant that you may not have cause to repent of it!"

"I shall never repent of a good action," replied André. "Marbeuf will owe his return to life to you. You have already saved Monsieur Vernelle and myself; and now there will be three persons with good cause to bless you."

"My interposition was all due to chance," replied Babiole, modestly. "Now, pray go at once, as your mind seems to be made up. If you delay, you may miss the assistant-doctor; besides, it is quite time for *me* to go out, if I want to find my employer at the shop. So good-bye, Monsieur André. Return as soon as you can. I shall be very glad to see you."

André shook hands with her very cordially, and had already reached the landing, when Babiole darted after him, and said: "I should be greatly obliged to you if you would not speak of me to the doctor, or my uncle either."

"You need have no fears of that, mademoiselle. Your name sha'n't be mixed up in the affair. I shall merely say that I have heard Dr. Valbrègue speak of this singular case, and that I should like to see for myself if this famous Number Nineteen isn't a friend, whom I have been looking for during more than a month."

Babiole re-entered her little sitting-room, gloomy and pre-occupied. She now almost regretted her disclosures to André, for she augured no good from Marbeuf's reappearance. But she had done her duty, and, whatever the result might be, she would have no cause for self-reproach. She now had to settle matters with her employer; and she had just put on her bonnet, when she heard someone knock at her door. As she did not expect any other visitor, she imagined that André had come back to ask for some further information, and she hastened to open the door. To her great astonishment, however, she found herself face to face with Madame Divet, whom the ascent of the stairs seemed to have reduced to the last stage of exhaustion. She was puffing like a porpoise, and drops of perspiration were trickling down her forehead. Babiole felt strongly inclined to shut the door in her face, but really pitying her sad plight, she finally stepped aside, and allowed her to enter. Moreover, this unexpected visit would make the trip to the Boulevard Magenta unnecessary, and enable the young girl to sever the connection at once.

Madame Divet sank into a chair, which groaned under her weight, and then she exclaimed: "Well, well, you certainly roost in the air. Nothing but my sincere regard for you could ever have induced me to attempt such a climb."

"I regret that you have given yourself so much trouble, madame," rejoined Babiole, who was determined to remain perfectly polite. "I was just starting for your house. In fact, I should have been there before now, if—"

"If you hadn't received a visit from your lover."

"You know perfectly well that I have no lover, madame."

"Nonsense! didn't I just meet him on the stairs! He was rushing down at such a rate that he didn't notice me—and I was glad of it—but I

recognised him. It was the same young fellow who offered you his arm on Saturday evening. Ha, ha ! you are behaving nicely for a pink of propriety ! And to think that I have held you up as a model for all the other girls ! I certainly should never have believed such a thing of you ! ”

“ I haven’t the slightest idea what you mean, madame. ”

“ Don’t pretend innocence, my dear. That won’t go down with me. That young man escorted you home on the night before last, and I meet him again this morning, coming out of your apartments, after, evidently, paying you a visit. You can’t convince me that you spent all your time together talking politics. ”

“ Such insinuations are unworthy of you, madame, ” exclaimed poor Babiole, ready to cry with vexation, “ and if it was to say such things that you came here— ”

“ Oh no, I didn’t come to preach ! ” said Madame Divet, who, having recovered her breath, began to perceive that she was following the wrong tack. “ Of course, you have a perfect right to do as you like, and in one sense, you certainly haven’t made a bad choice. He is a handsome fellow, and really has quite a distinguished air, but I would willingly bet, almost any amount, that he hasn’t a penny. You may love him very much, but you really ought to think of your future. You were not born to live in an attic and wear cheap dresses, and this beau of yours will never be able to buy you any diamonds, you may be sure of it. ”

“ Enough, madame, I will listen to no more such talk. I had already decided not to remain any longer in your employ, and now, I must beg of you to leave the house. ”

“ Come, come, Babiole. You mustn’t be angry, my child. I see you are offended with me because I introduced you to that brute of a Bertaud. I admit I was wrong. He is old and ugly, and stingy into the bargain. Well, forget all about him—but do you know that you have made a deep impression on a real nobleman—a prince, worth, I don’t know how many millions, and who would be happy to lay his heart and fortune at your feet. ”

“ I was expecting to hear something like that, ” said Babiole, coldly.

“ Indeed ! Well, that is a good sign.—Yes ; you have seen the prince I refer to ; you met him yesterday at the Baroness d’Orbec’s, and you made such an impression on his heart that he will kill himself if you refuse him an opportunity to press his suit. Oh ! he only wishes to make your acquaintance, and wants you and I to breakfast with him at the Café Anglais. He is really a great lord, not in the least like Bertaud, who groans over every penny he is obliged to spend— ”

“ Madame, ” interrupted Babiole. “ I have allowed you to talk because I wished to see how far your audacity would go. But I must now beg of you to listen to me attentively, for this conversation will be the last we shall ever have together. ”

“ Oh, we’ll see about that ; but pray proceed, child. Say all you have to say, I will answer you afterwards. ”

“ When my uncle placed me in your establishment, do you think, madame, that he supposed you would ever give me such advice as this ? You know very well that he took you for a respectable woman. Had he been aware of your true character, he would never have intrusted me to your charge. But he knows you now— ”

“ What ! have you told him ? ”

“ What you did on Saturday ? Yes, madame ; and he has forbidden me

ever to set foot in your house again. He is going to find me a situation in some other establishment, and if I told him that you have repeated your attempts, he would not hesitate to denounce you to the authorities."

"You won't play me such a trick as to tell him, I hope?"

"If you will let me alone in future, I will be silent; but you must never come to me with any more infamous proposals, madame. Remember that. There is a bonnet which the Baroness d'Orbec rejected; please take it, and pray tell your prince that if he ever dares to come here, he will have good cause to repent it."

"You mean, I suppose, that your lover will give him a warm reception?"

"Will you never have done insulting me? I feel strongly tempted to have you turned out of the house; but to prevent you from slandering me to your friends, I prefer to tell you that the young man you speak of is in no degree my lover, and that he is to be married in a few days' time to a young lady of my acquaintance."

"Your acquaintance? What young ladies do you know, pray? What is this one's name?"

"She is the daughter of a well-known banker; and is named Mademoiselle Clémence Vernelle."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Madame Divet, with an air of mingled astonishment and incredulity.

"It is quite true, madame. He was at the Opéra Comique with her the other evening, in the same box as her father."

"I remember now. You certainly looked at him enough. The banker lives in the Rue Bergère, doesn't he?"

"Yes, and this young man is his private secretary."

"Then how under the sun did you become acquainted with him?"

"He stayed here a short time with one of his friends who lived in this house; but I had not seen him for more than a month, when he came to my help on the night before last."

"But you have probably made up for lost time since?"

"Enough!" cried Babiole, angrily. "I spent part of the day yesterday with my uncle, and afterwards I went to the house of your customer, that baroness, in the Rue Galilée."

"You may have met the young man there—who knows?"

"I did meet him there, and he told me just now that it was Monsieur Vernelle who had sent him."

"I know why."

"I don't, and I don't care to know."

"But I'll tell you, all the same. It will only serve the baroness right for deceiving me. If she had given me any hint of what was going on, I wouldn't have said a word to you. But I now understand why she is going away. She told me to-day that she thought of spending the winter in Italy. Your young friend was sent to her by his prospective father-in-law to request her to take herself off before the marriage. She must have made the Vernelles pay her a big price, especially as they can't dispense with her consent. Yolande has a very good idea of the value of things. But you don't understand me, I see. Well, then, to speak plainly, the Baroness d'Orbec is the lawful wife of Monsieur Vernelle, and the no less lawful mother of your friend's betrothed."

"What are you saying?" exclaimed Babiole, in astonishment.

"Only the truth, my dear. I have known Yolande for fifteen years, and I rendered her many valuable services before she left her fool of a

husband. She had no secrets from me in those days. Your young friend can't be hard to please, as he has accepted such a woman as his mother-in-law. Pray, what is this very liberal-minded young man's name?"

"André Subligny."

"Subligny, did you say? Subligny! Impossible. You must be mistaken." Madame Divet had abruptly risen, and the expression of her face had entirely changed.

"No, madame, I am not mistaken," said Babiole, as greatly astonished as her employer, although not for the same reason. "The young man you saw is certainly named André Subligny."

"Is he the son of Monsieur Charles Subligny—a shipping merchant of Havre?"

"He certainly came from Havre, and I think that his father was a ship-owner."

"Was? Is his father dead then?"

"Yes, madame. He died a ruined man. Monsieur André now only has his mother, who lives in Normandy. It was she who sent him to Paris with a letter of recommendation to Monsieur Vernelle."

"That explains it. She never had any knowledge of the affair," muttered Madame Divet, "and her son is equally ignorant of the truth." Then turning to Babiole again, she added: "And is it since his interview with the baroness that the young man told you that he expected to be married at an early date?"

"I heard it first yesterday. He repeated the announcement this morning."

"So he must have obtained Yolande's consent. I never had a very exalted opinion of her, but I really did not think her capable of going as far as this."

"Excuse me, madame," said Babiole, "but you are talking in enigmas—enigmas which I haven't the slightest desire to solve. You have certainly said all you can possibly have to say to me; and I have said all I have to say in reply. Our conversation being over, you can't take it amiss if I request you to leave me."

Madame Divet did not seem inclined to comply with Babiole's request. Indeed, instead of taking up the bonnet rejected by the baroness, and starting for the door, she began to walk up and down the room, gesticulating excitedly, and muttering incoherent words. Suddenly pausing in her promenade, just in front of Babiole, who was beginning to think she had gone mad, she said to her point-blank: "Would you like me to furnish you with the means of preventing your lover from marrying his employer's daughter?"

"Monsieur Subligny is my friend, but not my lover," replied Babiole, firmly. "He is betrothed to Mademoiselle Vernelle, who loves him, and whom he loves in return. Why should I prevent him from being happy?"

"You are very generous, child. Whatever your connection with this young man may be, I don't believe that he is indifferent to you. Confess, now, that if he had courted you, you wouldn't have refused to become his wife?"

Babiole blushed deeply, but answered never a word; and her face gave no indication of what her real feelings might be.

"He preferred the banker's daughter to you, because she will be very rich," added Madame Divet.

"You are very much mistaken; Monsieur Vernelle is a bankrupt."

"You astonish me. But, no matter, his wife is rolling in money. Gold is almost the only thing to which no unsavoury odour clings; and it is because he relies upon receiving a handsome dowry with his bride that he is going to marry her."

"I am sure that the ideas you impute to him never once entered his mind," retorted Babiole, indignantly.

"I am satisfied now that you are in love with this young man, and I don't blame you, for he is exceedingly handsome. You would certainly be very foolish to marry another when you have only to say the word to make this marriage an impossibility."

"I hope it will take place," responded Babiole, firmly. "I wish it could be solemnised to-morrow; still, if Monsieur Subligny did not know that his affianced wife was the daughter of the pretended Baroness d'Orbec, I should feel it my duty to inform him. But he is perfectly well aware of the fact, as he called to see her yesterday to ask her consent. So he knows Mademoiselle Vernelle's exact position, and persists in his suit. Hence there isn't the slightest reason why I should interfere, and I should reproach myself all my life if I did anything to mar his happiness."

"Babiole, I really admire you. Your generosity amounts to positive heroism. But you are making a very great mistake. Besides, even if I allowed you to do this, you would sacrifice yourself for nothing, and your André would only be the loser. It isn't a question of destroying his happiness by preventing his marriage, but of saving him from a terrible misfortune." The young girl was becoming more and more mystified. "Yes, a terrible misfortune," repeated Madame Divet, earnestly; "the greatest that could possibly befall a husband and his wife. You must warn them, or rather warn him, as it is in him that you are most deeply interested."

"Why don't you warn him yourself?"

"Excuse me, but I don't take the slightest interest in him; besides, I don't want to meddle with Yolande's affairs. She might take offence, as she has given her consent to this marriage; and as I have never had any cause to complain of her, I ought not to harm her. With you, however, it is very different. You are under no obligations to her."

"Oh, no, and I certainly hope I may never hear her name again. But you advise me to warn Monsieur André—warn him of what?"

"Listen, Babiole, I have great confidence in you, but I cannot go into particulars; nor can I explain matters except by stating a parallel case. Suppose that one of your friends—one of your relatives, if you like—was about to marry a woman supposing her to be a spinster or a widow, and that you learnt by chance that this woman was already married, and that her husband was living, what would you do? Would you allow the unfortunate man to marry her?"

"Certainly not, if I had proofs of the fact; but if I hadn't, I should be afraid of making a mistake. But what similarity can there be between this and Mademoiselle Vernelle's case? You don't pretend, I suppose, that she is already married, and that she is in league with her father to deceive the man she loves?"

"Mademoiselle Vernelle knows nothing at all about this, nor does her father, but the facts are somewhat similar all the same. Indeed, I assure you that if Monsieur Subligny marries Mademoiselle Vernelle, his position will be worse than that of a criminal. He might be ignorant of it, but there would be plenty of persons to tell him the truth after the misfortune became irreparable."

"You would be one of these persons, perhaps?"

"No, I am not in the least spiteful. I should say nothing; but I am not the only person who knows the secret. Your friend would die of grief, and his wife, too."

"And yet you hesitate to confide the secret to me. You point out the danger, but don't furnish me with the means of averting it."

"Child, I might say that you have just treated me in a manner that releases me from any obligation towards you. But I never bear malice, and what you said won't prevent me from doing the young man you love so well a service. But the difficulty is this. You have just told me that there must be proofs in such a case, and that is quite true. Well, I can supply proofs—written proofs—and I will hand them to you if you will come to my house—"

"Never!"

"What a simpleton you are, my poor Babiole! Do you imagine that the prince is lying in wait for you in my work-room, like a spider lies in wait for a fly? I think too much of my reputation to allow any such goings on in my establishment. What I said to you was solely prompted by my interest in your welfare. You don't believe me, so let us say no more about the matter. I will let the prince know that you don't care to make his acquaintance, and you can accompany me to my house on the Boulevard Magenta, with perfect safety. I have a cab at the door, and there is a letter that will tell you all that you wish to know, in my desk at home. I will give it to you; you can read it, and afterwards do exactly what you think proper. I can safely promise that you will be at home again in an hour's time, unless you prefer to run after Monsieur André, and show him the letter, and that wouldn't be a bad idea, for he has no time to lose—he is on the brink of a precipice."

"Then it is a letter that will furnish the necessary proofs—a letter from whom?"

"No matter who wrote it; you must see it to understand the situation; and if you won't take the trouble to come with me, well, I shall burn it as soon as I get home—so much the worse for Monsieur André."

This announcement alarmed Babiole. Her employer spoke with so much earnestness that it really seemed as if she spoke the truth in declaring that André was in danger, and that Babiole alone could save him; and such being the case, she decided to endure another hour of Madame Divet's company, even if she did run some risk in doing so. "If I should consent to accompany you, will you allow me to bring the letter away with me?" she asked.

"Certainly; if I intended to keep it, it would not be worth while for me to show it to you. Your friend must see it. He will no doubt recognise the handwriting. Come, child, make up your mind."

Babiole hesitated an instant longer. "To whom was the letter addressed?" she inquired at last.

"How persistent you are! I begin to think that you are only jesting with me, or else trying to find out all you can, and then leave me in the lurch. I shall tell you nothing more. I have told you enough, and more than enough already. After all, I take no interest in your André, and I see no reason why I should do him a favour at the risk of getting myself into trouble with a person whose good-will it is well worth my while to retain. "Are you coming, yes or no?"

"Yes," said Babiole, who reflected that she had really nothing to fear in a millinery shop on the Boulevard Magenta, in broad daylight.

"That's proper!" exclaimed Madame Divet. "I am glad you have ceased to regard me as an ogress. Have no fears, child. No one will eat you; and if you see your light-haired friend again to-day, you can open his eyes to his danger. Take the baroness's rejected bonnet, and let us be off."

Babiole was already dressed to go, so she picked up the hand-box, and followed her employer down-stairs, first locking the door of her apartments. As she passed out, the doorkeeper who held her in high esteem, called out: "One minute, Mam'zelle Babois!" For she always addressed her by her real name—the same that figured on the rent-bills, which were always promptly paid by Babiole on the day they fell due.

"What is the matter, Madame Hippolyte?"

"Wasn't the light-complexioned gentleman who called just now, the person who spent a night with poor Monsieur Marbeuf?"

"Yes, Madame Hippolyte; and if he calls again before I return, please tell him that I sha'n't be gone long, and ask him to wait for me."

"I won't fail to do so. Is he likely to bring you any news of his friend?"

"I hope so."

"Well, it will come none too soon. Rent day falls next month."

Babiole felt no inclination to prolong the conversation. She already regretted having said so much, for Madame Divet had paused, probably to listen. And she must have overheard the dialogue, for she asked: "Is it possible that you expect to see your André again this morning?"

"Yes, madame; and if he does not find me at home he will be anxious to know what has become of me," was the quick response.

"Still another thrust at me. You seem to imagine that I want to kidnap you. You need have no fears. I will return you to young Subigny safe and sound. And, by the way, how fortunate it is that you are to see him again to-day! You will have an opportunity to inform him of his danger without delay."

Babiole made no reply. A cab was at the door. The girl entered it, with Madame Divet, and they drove together towards the Boulevard Magenta. But few words were exchanged during their drive, which lasted barely a quarter of an hour. As they reached their destination, and while Madame Divet was settling with the cabman, Babiole said to herself: "It is surprising that that stylish baroness should purchase her bonnets in this unfashionable neighbourhood. It is probably because she dealt with Madame Divet in former years—when she was Madame Vernelle."

"I have sent the cab away," said Madame Divet, now turning to the young girl. "You can go home on foot. It is only a short distance, and the weather's fine."

"Nothing could please me better," exclaimed Babiole, dismissing her last lingering feeling of distrust. For when you walk, you can go where you like, while you do not always know where a vehicle may take you.

After passing through the work-room where two young milliners smiled at Babiole, whom they liked very well, though they were a little jealous of her on account of the privileges she enjoyed in the establishment, Madame Divet ushered her companion into a small and very prettily furnished room, where customers of distinction usually tried on their bonnets. "Sit down, my dear," said the fat woman. "The letters are in my bed-room. I will go and get them. It isn't worth while for you to accompany me. I shall be back in a moment."

Babiole felt considerably relieved to find that she was not expected to go beyond this little room, which was open to all customers. She felt quite

safe there. Indeed, there was nothing alarming about Madame Divet's actions ; and the young girl almost reproached herself for her earlier distrust. At least ten minutes elapsed before her employer returned, holding in her hand a packet of letters tied together with a pink ribbon. "I have kept you waiting, but it was not my fault," she said, gaily. "I have been the custodian of these letters so long, and had so carefully hidden them away that I had some difficulty in finding them ; but here they are at last. You see that I am a woman of my word, and that you do very wrong to distrust me. I assure you that if you hadn't come here, I should have allowed that young man to put his head in the noose unhindered, if only to punish you for your unjust suspicions. Come, now, let us see. It is not necessary for you to wade through all this rubbish. You would have to spend the day here, if you did ; besides, I don't care to give you the entire correspondence. One never knows what may happen. I will pick out the letter I referred to, and you can take it away with you when you have read it."

A moment later Madame Divet handed one of the notes to Babiole who began to peruse it attentively. It was apparently a love letter, and its impassioned language made the young girl blush. "Who wrote this?" she suddenly asked ; "it begins 'My dear Yolande,' and is signed 'Charles.'"

"Why, it was written to Madame Vernelle, by your friend André's father," retorted Madame Divet. "Have you remarked those allusions to '*our* daughter, Clémence,' and do you understand the situation now?"

"Good heavens ! How dreadful !" cried Babiole in dismay. "Yes ! Ah, you have certainly rendered Monsieur Subligny a great service. Mademoiselle Vernelle is Monsieur Vernelle's daughter only in name. Monsieur André could never marry her ! It would be too terrible. But what a base woman Madame Vernelle must be ! She not only deceived her husband, but she has apparently consented to this marriage."

"Well, my dear, I hope that you are no longer angry with me for insisting on your coming here," resumed Madame Divet. "You must admit that I was actuated only by the kindest of motives. Thanks to me, you will be able to save two young people who are walking with closed eyes upon the verge of a frightful precipice, to say nothing of the fact that your André will be deeply grateful to you, and that, by-and-bye, after he has recovered from the shock, he will discover, I am sure, that you are ten times prettier than Mademoiselle Vernelle ; and as you are so thoroughly conscientious, and quite as attractive and stylish as any fashionable young lady, I see no reason why he shouldn't marry you. He is not such a great aristocrat, after all. His father was only a plain business man, and so, indeed, is he."

This suggestion, perhaps, harmonized with Babiole's secret hopes ; but she gave no sign that such was the case. Having folded the letter into a small compass, she had placed it in her purse, and her chief desire now was to get away, for she wished to reach home before André returned from the hospital.

"I will detain you no longer, my child," continued Madame Divet, "but I cannot let you go without drinking to our reconciliation. I want you to taste my ratafia—the same we took on my last birthday."

Babiole was terribly thirsty ; her lips were parched, and her throat seemed on fire from excitement and emotion, so she replied : "I will take a few drops in a glass of water."

"Just as you please. I shall take mine unadulterated, however. Wait a second. I will bring it to you."

Madame Divet again disappeared, but returned almost immediately with a tray on which stood a bottle and two glasses—a large one which she offered to her visitor, and a small one intended for herself. Babiole emptied hers at a single draught, while Madame Divet sipped her own allowance. “It is delicious,” she murmured. “It cheers my heart, and I had need of it, for—though you may not believe me—I really feel sad when I think of the grief and consternation this letter is sure to cause. Be careful not to lose it.”

The liquor, which was having such a beneficial effect upon Madame Divet, only increased Babiole’s feeling of discomfort. The poor child had no sooner drained her glass than she began to experience a feeling of utter bewilderment. She passed her hand over her forehead, and she was obliged to lean back in her chair to keep from falling. “What is the matter with you, my dear?” inquired Madame Divet, with great apparent solicitude.

“I don’t feel well,” replied Babiole, “and my eyes will close in spite of all my efforts to keep them open. I feel as if I wanted to sleep.”

“Lie down a few moments. Come, I will support you. Try to walk to the sofa, where you can rest awhile. When you have had a nap you will feel much better.”

“No; I must—return home. I want—a cab.”

“You cannot stand alone. Sleep a bit. I will wake you in an hour, and take you back to the Rue Lamartine.”

“No—André. I must see him! He will be there.”

“What of that? He isn’t going to be married to-morrow. You will have plenty of opportunities to see him.” So saying, Madame Divet passed her strong arm about Babiole’s waist, and carried, rather than led, her toward the sofa.

The young girl stretched herself upon it, murmuring André’s name, and almost immediately afterwards she became entirely unconscious of what was passing around her. Madame Divet, who seemed to have had experience in such cases, felt Babiole’s pulse, and bent over her to listen to her light breathing; then reassured, no doubt, concerning the potency of her cordial, she arranged the folds of the girl’s dress, crossed her hands upon her breast, and hastened into the adjoining room. A man was waiting there—a respectable-looking, well-dressed man, with a smoothly-shaven face—a man who looked very much like the majordomo of a palatial establishment. “It is all right,” she said to him. “The girl is asleep, and won’t wake up for twelve hours or more. But I can’t keep her here a moment longer. The brougham is waiting in the little street, you said?”

“Quite so,” replied the man, with a strong German accent.

“Very well; I will wrap her in a shawl, and you must carry her to the carriage. She isn’t heavy, and you know the way.”

“Perfectly, madame. Here is your one-thousand-franc note. Now, where is the young lady?”

Madame Divet pocketed the money, and then said: “We must first come to an understanding, however. What I have done was done to oblige the baroness, rather than for the sake of money, and I must not be compromised. The prince, whom I saw this morning, promised me that he would act as a gentleman. You are to take the girl to the house he has leased near the Parc Monceau, but mind she mustn’t be forcibly detained there. No violence, pray. Please remind the prince that he isn’t in Russia, and that he will go straight to the assizes, if he ventures to ill-treat the girl. Do you understand?”

"Clearly," responded the majordomo, whose knowledge of the French language seemed to be confined to its adverbs.

"Then follow me." As she spoke, Madame Divet ushered him into the adjoining room, enveloped Babiole—still unconscious—in a large Scotch plaid, and the man then lifted her in his arms, and bore her from the room.

The house stood at the corner of the Boulevard Magenta, and the Rue des Petits-Hôtels, and had two doors—one communicating with the boulevard, and the other with the side-street, where a vehicle was waiting. Babiole was placed in it, the man sprang upon the box, and the coachman drove off at a brisk trot. André's destiny again depended upon the brave girl who had already once saved him.

IX.

WHILE Babiole, trusting to Madame Divet's promise, was leaving the Rue Lamartine, André Subligny was hastening towards the Necker Hospital. He was not to see M. Vernelle again before dinner-time; so the best use he could make of his day's leave was to extricate his friend from the unpleasant position in which he found himself. "One of two things must be true," thought Subligny, "either Marbeuf has no cause to reproach himself, or, on the contrary, he has betrayed my confidence; but, in either case, I must interfere as soon as possible, for, if he isn't guilty, it would be inhuman not to go to his aid; and if he is guilty, it is to my interest to secure his release before his identity is discovered. I will then question him myself, and after his confession I will take such precautions as will keep his accident a secret from everyone, for I was the real cause of it, as I intrusted him with the money which he perhaps lost, unless, indeed, it was stolen from him."

He had no time to lose. Uncle Auguste had promised his niece that he would say nothing upon the subject before the following Thursday. Still, he might yield to the persuasions of the assistant doctor, whose suspicions were already aroused, and make disclosures which would certainly involve Babiole in the affair—a consummation which Subligny earnestly desired to avoid. He reached the hospital between twelve and one o'clock, a most unfortunate time, as this was not visiting day. The chief doctor is very seldom there at that hour, and it not unfrequently happens that his subordinates embrace this opportunity to enjoy a cigar on the Boulevard Montparnasse. However, André fully expected to encounter obstacles; and was resolved to succeed in his undertaking in spite of them. The doorkeeper began by informing him that no visitor could enter the wards without a written permit from the director, and that the director was now absent; whereupon André, who was prepared for the announcement, asked leave to speak to Dr. Valbrègue, or to one of his assistants.

Dr. Valbrègue would be at the hospital at one o'clock to perform a post-mortem examination, but he had not yet arrived. M. Bosc, the assistant doctor, had not finished his breakfast, and the porter did not care to disturb him, at least not without good cause. Subligny thereupon decided to say that he had come to give the doctor some information concerning a patient in the Saint Ferdinand Ward—a patient whose name the officers of the institution had not succeeded in discovering—and the doorkeeper, mistaking the young secretary for a member of the police force, thereupon ad-

mitted him, placing him in charge of a messenger who happened to be within call at the time. André was well satisfied with this result, and he cheerfully followed his guide, who conducted him to the room where Bosc and Babiole had had their interview together. "Monsieur Bosc, here is some one who wants to see you," said the messenger as he ushered André into the apartment.

André found himself enveloped in a cloud of smoke which choked and nearly blinded him—a cloud of smoke produced by the tobacco in half-a-dozen pipes and also by some green wood burning in a stove. There seemed to be such imminent danger of suffocation, that André paused upon the threshold in dismay. The gentlemen present—six in number—were sipping their coffee, flavoured with a dash of brandy, and served by Madame Colas, who was grumbling because one of the party had declared that she had given them nothing but chicory. Whom should André address? he was considerably in doubt.

"What do you want?" gruffly asked one of the fellows, a rather shabbily-dressed and unkempt-looking giant.

"I wish to see the assistant doctor of the Saint Ferdinand Ward," replied Subligny, between two fits of coughing.

"To inquire concerning the ailments of the patients about whom you will be questioned at your next examination?"

"Excuse me, I am not a medical student, and—"

"Then admission here is forbidden."

"I have a personal matter to discuss with Monsieur — Monsieur—"

"Bosc—you don't even seem to know his name."

"That is very true," replied André, annoyed by this reception, "but Dr. Valbrègue knows me; and if he were at the hospital I shouldn't be subjected to treatment of this kind."

The name of Valbrègue produced a marked effect. The inquirer became silent, and Bosc, who had been concealed from view by the stove, now rose and approached the visitor.

"In what way can I be of service to you?" he asked, raising his cap politely.

"I should like to have a private conversation with you."

"If the interview is likely to be a long one, I haven't time just now."

"It is in reference to Number Nineteen," said André, lowering his voice.

"That is very different. I am at your service, sir. But we have no parlour. The administration has neglected to provide us with one. If you don't object, we can talk on the staircase."

"It is immaterial to me what place you select."

The assistant doctor led the way on to the landing—the same spot where he had accosted Babiole on the day before. "Excuse the rather rude reception my comrade gave you," he said. "We are continually besieged by simpletons who come to ask our assistance in preparing for their examinations. But I don't see how he could have mistaken you for a student. You don't look like one in the least. So it is about Number Nineteen that you wish to see me? Do you know him?"

"I think so."

"But you have not been here to see him since he entered the hospital?"

"No; but a person who was here yesterday described him to me, and the description corresponds perfectly with that of one of my friends. The lady may be mistaken, but I should like to see your patient myself."

"That is a very easy matter. But isn't the person to whom you refer a very pretty girl who has an uncle here?"

"Yes, sir. But why did you think so?"

"Ah! that girl is sharp. She certainly played a fine trick on me. Would you believe it, I was in the ward during her visit, and by the way in which she looked at our celebrated Number Nineteen, I suspected that she knew who he was. And the uncle, too, must know him, for I saw them whispering together. Now, as Dr. Valbrègue was anxious to discover who this patient was, I stopped the niece on the stairs, and although she finally consented to step into the room there, I could extort no information from her, though I plied her with questions. But now you have come to solve the mystery for us. Valbrègue will be delighted. But why the deuce did the girl refuse to enlighten us?"

"I think she wasn't quite sure of the patient's identity. She had met him a few times, but had never spoken to him."

"Nor did she yesterday. It was the uncle who did all the talking. Number Nineteen told me, however, that he thought he had seen the girl somewhere, though he could not recollect where. He remembers nothing. It is a remarkable case of complete obliteration of memory. We can now make a very interesting experiment. Will he awake from his mental lethargy on finding himself face to face with you? That is the question. I hardly know how it is best to proceed."

"If you will be kind enough to take me to him—"

"Oh, certainly, and at once. I think, too, that it will be better not to prepare him for your visit. Are you a relative of his?"

"No, sir. I am only a friend, but a very intimate friend. I was staying with him at the time of his disappearance."

"Good! We shall not only find out now who he is, but what happened to him. Would you believe it, we are not yet satisfied as regards the nature of the accident which befell him? Valbrègue declares that his condition is the result of a fall."

"I am quite as much in the dark about the accident as you are. He is not quarrelsome, and he is very temperate in his habits."

Still, he may have taken a drop too much, just for once. But we are wasting time talking here when we have only to see for ourselves. Let us go upstairs, if you please."

The assistant knocked the ashes from his pipe, placed it in his pocket, and led the way to the floor above. "Pass in front, and walk on ahead, so that he will not see me," said Bosc, when they had reached the ward. "Number Nineteen has the last bed on the left-hand side. Go straight to it, and speak to him boldly. It is possible, however, that he isn't there, and in that case, we shall have to look for him in the garden."

André hesitated an instant. He had never before been in a hospital, and the sight greatly impressed him. "And it is here that Marheuf has lived for more than a month!" he said to himself, "and if he had died, his poor body would have gone straight from the dissecting table to the pauper's grave."

"What can you expect?" said the assistant, reading his companion's thoughts. "It is not a very cheerful sight, certainly, but it might be worse. Step inside. The patients are looking at us."

André obeyed, walking cautiously, and even holding his breath, for it seemed to him that the eyes of all the patients were fixed upon him. The assistant followed, pausing occasionally to address a word of encouragement

to some poor wretch who knew that there was no hope left for him, or to give an order to one of the nurses.

On reaching the further end of the room, André found the bed empty, and turned to consult his guide, who at once rejoined him, asking of Babiole's uncle: "Number Nineteen has gone down into the garden, has he not?"

"He went down about a quarter-of-an-hour after breakfast," replied old Auguste, drily.

Almost at the same moment, a nurse who had just entered the ward, approached the assistant doctor, and said: "Monsieur Bosc, Dr. Valbrègue has arrived, and wishes to see you in the dissecting-room."

"Very well, I will be there in a moment."

André could not repress a shudder on hearing those ominous words, "the dissecting-room." The nurse had spoken them just as he would have said, "The doctor is waiting for you in the dining-room."

"If you continue to improve at this rate," continued Bosc, addressing Uncle Auguste, "it won't be worth while for your niece to come to see you again, for you will be able to leave the hospital by the end of the week."

"You needn't trouble yourself about my niece," growled Number Twenty.

"I know that, of course; but I am sure you won't be sorry to hear from her; and this gentleman can give you news of her." Then noticing that the patient was scrutinizing André with a far from benevolent air, Bosc added, mischievously: "This gentleman saw her this morning, and she spoke to him about Number Nineteen. It seems that she knows him. Do you pretend the contrary?"

"It is possible she may know him, but she isn't obliged to tell you so if she does, nor am I. I am no detective."

"You needn't be angry about it. This gentleman is a friend of Number Nineteen's, and your niece certainly had a perfect right to tell him about your opposite neighbour. The gentleman has come to identify him, and poor Number Nineteen will at last be restored to his friends."

"So much the better for him. But I should like very much to know how this gentleman became acquainted with my niece."

"I lived for a few days in the same house as she does," replied André, "and next Thursday she herself will explain to you why she applied to me in this matter."

"I hope so, I'm sure," said the uncle sullenly.

"But, in the meantime, you must not allow yourself to get excited," added the assistant. "Quiet will do you more good than any medicine."

As he spoke he nudged André, who understood and beat a retreat, for he did not care to enter into an explanation, which might bring about a quarrel between Babiole and her irritable uncle. When they were safely out of the ward, Bosc laughingly remarked: "The old fellow thinks you are the girl's lover."

"If he does he is very much mistaken."

"I am sorry for you, then, for she is charming. But to return to our subject, Valbrègue has arrived, and I am going to take you to him. He would not like it if I proceeded in this matter without consulting him, especially as he is particularly anxious to observe the phenomena attendant upon the return of memory, which will, I hope, take place when our patient sees you. Will it be sudden or gradual, however? We cannot tell, and it will be a very interesting change to watch."

"I should be very glad to see Monsieur Valbrègue," began André, "but—"

"But what? Oh! I understand, you are nervous, and you don't want to see the bodies. I can understand that. It is a repulsive sight when one is not used to it. But don't be alarmed, Dr. Valbrègue has only just arrived, and he hasn't yet had time to begin work. As soon as he earns the object of your visit, he will leave his autopsy, in which he is much less interested than in Number Nineteen. Come with me. We shall only have to step in and step out, for he is too much of a gentleman to detain you long in such a disagreeable place; and he will go with us in search of Number Nineteen, I am sure of it."

André made no further objections. He did not want the assistant doctor to take him for a weak, effeminate fellow, and besides he was anxious to confer with Dr. Valbrègue, who held Marbeuf's fate in his hands. The chief doctor would know him from having seen him at M. Vernolle's house. So he could present himself with all confidence although greatly embarrassed on account of the position in which he was placed in regard to Marbeuf. It was impossible for him to tell the whole truth to the doctor; and yet the latter would hardly fail to question him respecting the probable cause of Marbeuf's disappearance. The assistant doctor, after descending the stairs, turned into a covered gallery which bordered one side of a courtyard as gloomy and as desolate as that of a prison, and which led to a pavilion annexed to one of the main buildings. Midway they met a girl about eighteen years of age, clad neither like the patients nor the nurses, but who was by no means ugly with her tiptilted nose, bright eyes, laughing mouth and profusion of curling chestnut hair. "Good morning, Monsieur Bosc," she said as she passed, "Dr. Valbrègue is waiting for you."

"Has he begun the autopsy?"

"No, not yet. The dissector has not come. The doctor is talking with my father, who complains that the rats spoil his subjects. Last night they nearly devoured a woman, worth at least thirty francs."

"He ought to set some traps for them."

"The director won't buy any. He is so mean."

"Then your father ought to have a safe. Are you going to breakfast? A good appetite, Miss Scarifier."

As André listened to this dialogue, he grew cold to the very marrow of his bones. "You are not accustomed to this sort of thing," remarked his companion, laughing. "That young girl was not reared in the lap of luxury. Her mother is one of the nurses, and her father assists in the dissecting-room and scarifies our patients. You know what I mean—he applies the cupping vessels, and so we call his daughter Miss Scarifier."

André understood only too well. But it was worse when Bosc conducted him through a brightly lighted room, where five lifeless bodies lay extended upon as many zinc-covered tables. There was a possibility that these bodies might be claimed by relatives; if not, they would be sent to the dead-house in the Rue du Fer-à-Moulin, where they would be labelled like so many pieces of merchandise, and where the students who had entered upon the third year of their medical studies could select them. One fellow may need a consumptive, another a cancerous subject, and he makes his mark upon the arm or hip of the one he chooses, which is ultimately handed over to him. In this room a strong scent of carbolic acid mingled with the overpowering, nauseating odour of decomposition. A cat, which did not perform her duties as a rat-catcher very faithfully, at least, according to

the young girl before alluded to, was lapping some milk from a porringer. And this dreary apartment was only the ante-chamber of the room reserved for the *post-mortem* examinations. In the latter the only furniture consisted of six stone tables, with brass taps above them, and several troughs filled with chloride of lime. Upon one of the tables lay the subject Valbrègue desired to dissect in order to discover the cause of death, and near by stood the doctor, quietly talking with the "scarifier."

The doctor had already donned his apron, and André had some difficulty in recognizing the fashionable physician he had met at M. Vernelle's a few mornings before. Dr. Valbrègue, on the contrary, recognized the young secretary at the first glance, and dismissing his subordinate, who was anathematizing the rats, he came straight towards André, and inquired with much apparent interest: "Is Monsieur Vernelle worse?"

"No, sir," stammered Subligny, who could scarcely speak, so greatly did the surroundings disgust him. "I did not come at the request of Monsieur Vernelle."

"I saw him last evening, and I arrived in time, thanks to the zeal my assistants displayed in warning me of the result of the analysis, for you are probably aware that, under pretext of carrying out my directions, a strong dose of one of the most violent poisons known was administered to your employer twice a day."

"I am aware of it, sir, but—"

"Do you know at whose instigation this was done?" André made no reply, "I understand your reluctance to accuse anyone," resumed the doctor. "It is too grave a matter. Monsieur Vernelle himself begged me to keep the affair a secret. I consented to do so, but only for the present, however. The druggist, whom I have already questioned on the subject, declares that he made up the prescription himself, and sent it to Monsieur Vernelle's house by a trusty messenger, who delivered the package into the hands of the doorkeeper. The investigation can be conducted quietly, but there must be one. Tell me, however, is it really true that Monsieur Vernelle is a ruined man? I did not dare to question him about his affairs."

"The report is only too true, unfortunately."

"I am truly sorry to hear it, for I both like and respect him. Tell him that I sincerely sympathize with him in his reverses, and that I am entirely at his service if I can assist him in any way. But what is the matter with you, my dear sir? You are very pale, and—"

The assistant doctor made a gesture in the direction of the body which Subligny was trying his best not to see. "Ah! I understand," said Dr. Valbrègue, "you are not accustomed to such ghastly sights. I won't inflict them upon you any longer. Let us step into the next room."

André supposed he would be obliged to pass through the dead-room again, but Dr. Valbrègue opened a door which the young man had not noticed before, and which led into an apartment of less lugubrious aspect. It was one in which the hospital physicians met for conference in especial cases. André entered it, followed by the assistant doctor and the latter's superior.

"Now, my dear sir, if you will be kind enough to state the object of your visit I will do what I can to serve you," said Dr. Valbrègue.

"This gentleman is acquainted with Number Nineteen?" volunteered the assistant hastily.

"Oh, this is a great piece of news, and a most welcome one. I was beginning to despair of effecting a cure, and yet I could not bear the thought of sending the poor fellow to a madhouse. Have you seen him?"

"No, sir, not yet ; but a young lady who saw him yesterday recognized him and lost no time in informing me of the fact, so that I came at once."

"You were quite right. We will take you to him immediately. But who is he?"

"He is one of my old schoolfellows, and his name is Louis Marbeuf."

"What did he do before his accident?"

"He was a clerk in a mercantile house in the Rue de Sentier."

"And his employer made no attempt to discover what had become of him? That is very singular." Then, after reflecting, the doctor added:

"But, sir, you were present on the day before yesterday, when I was telling Monsieur Vernelle about this unfortunate young fellow. Why didn't you then mention that one of your friends had disappeared in a mysterious manner?"

André started. The conversation was beginning badly, for almost the very first question asked by Dr. Valbrègue indicated a slight suspicion. However, some reply was imperative, and André could find nothing better to say than: "I was greatly preoccupied that day. The real state of Monsieur Vernelle's business affairs had just been made known to me; and, besides, I had no idea that the patient you spoke of was my friend."

"But you knew that your friend had disappeared?"

"Yes, sir, and I thought of visiting the hospital, but it was only on the day before yesterday that I saw you at Monsieur Vernelle's, and yesterday I had not a single moment to myself. I intended calling on Thursday next, but this morning the young lady referred to told me she had seen Marbeuf here, and so I came at once."

"Oh, I do not blame you for the oversight. But let us return to our subject. You know your friend's present condition, probably, and how he happened to be brought here. Will you kindly enlighten me as to the circumstances that attended his mysterious disappearance? When did you see him last?"

"A little more than a month ago. I had just arrived in Paris, and he insisted upon my staying with him."

"Then you were not acting as Monsieur Vernelle's secretary at that time?"

"No, sir. I brought M. Vernelle a letter of recommendation from my mother, but I did not enter his employ until the following day."

"That is to say, not until the day after your friend's disappearance?"

"Quite so. On the evening of his disappearance we dined together at a restaurant at the corner of the Faubourg Montmartre and the Rue Lafayette. Marbeuf waited for me at a café at the corner of the Rue Drouot until my interview with Monsieur Vernelle was over."

"And after dinner what happened?"

"After dinner, between eight and nine o'clock, he left me."

"Did he tell you where he was going?"

André had expected this question, and he dreaded it, for he felt that he would be obliged to answer it with a falsehood; for, if he told the truth, he would have to acquaint M. Vernelle's physician with the story of the bank-notes. He lacked courage to do this, so, though it cost him a terrible effort to speak an untruth, he replied in the negative. "But knowing his habits, you may have been able to conjecture where he was going?" urged the doctor.

"I was not familiar with his habits, sir. We had not seen each other for several years, and I only reached his lodgings that morning. A neigh-

bour, the young lady who recognised him yesterday, has since told me that he was in the habit of spending his evenings at a café and of not returning home until very late."

"At what café?"

"Probably at the café where he waited for me before dinner; but I don't know, for I inquired about him there, and the waiters said that they had seen nothing of him."

"But before leaving you, he must have given you some reason or excuse, for a man must have some reason for thus deserting a friend he has not seen for a long time, especially when he has just dined with him."

"I asked him no questions, for I was in a hurry to return home. I had spent the previous night in the train and was very tired. In fact, it was I who refused to accompany him. He merely said to me that he would return home soon, and when midnight came, and he still failed to make his appearance, I began to feel anxious."

"You had not been asleep, then?"

"No, sir," replied André, who began to feel annoyed by this close examination. "I tried to sleep, but sleep wouldn't come. I was thinking about my prospects. My whole life seemed likely to change. M. Vernelle had just engaged me as his secretary; besides my friend's prolonged absence seemed unaccountable. Was it a presentiment? I don't know, but this much is certain—I passed a sleepless night."

"And afterwards?"

"I afterwards left the rooms which Marbeuf occupied in the Rue Lamar-tine."

"Without troubling yourself any further about him?"

"You are very much mistaken, sir. All the efforts that have been made to find him were made by me. His employers were informed of his strange disappearance, and so was the commissary of police. I also paid several visits to the Morgue."

"But you forgot to speak to Monsieur Vernelle about the affair."

"I did not think it necessary to say anything to him about it. He was not acquainted with Marbeuf, and his time was too much engrossed with business matters for me to trouble him about an affair that did not interest him in the least."

"But it must have interested you. To what cause did you attribute your friend's disappearance?"

"I feared he had been murdered."

"Have you any reason to suppose that he had a large sum of money on his person?"

"No, sir, but does it not occur to you that you are speaking very much as if you were a magistrate and I a suspected person? I trust that you don't suspect me of having attempted to kill my friend—I, who have come to identify and claim him."

"You are right," Dr. Valbrègue replied, smiling. "If you had felt any desire to get rid of him, you would not have come here to look for him, and I assure you that I am not actuated by the sentiments you impute to me. The questions I have put to you are purely scientific in their aim—as I will now explain to you. This is a very unusual case. In fact, I fancy it is the only case in the annals of medicine. The complete paralysis of the memory for thirty-five days after the accident, and while the general health of the patient remains unimpaired, is a fact that has never been noted before, at least, not to my knowledge. Consequently, it is a matter

of the utmost importance to us to ascertain the exact nature of the accident which produced it. I think it was a fall, but I am not sure ; and it is to corroborate my theory that I have questioned you in regard to the circumstances of your friend's disappearance. You will permit me to refer to them again ? ”

“As often as you please, sir,” replied André, calmed by this assurance.

“There are many different theories on this subject,” continued Dr. Valbrègue. “Your friend may have been assaulted in the street—but robbery could not have been the motive of the crime, for his watch and several gold pieces were found in his pocket—or he may have been thrown from a window by some jealous husband or rival.”

“All I can tell you, sir,” replied André, “is that Marbeuf has always led a very quiet and moral life, and that during the short time I spent with him, he said nothing that would furnish the slightest foundation for this last theory.”

“Then you know no more about what could have taken him to the Boulevard des Invalides than we do ? It was there he was picked up, and that is a long way from the place where you left him.”

“Yes, and I have not the slightest idea what could have taken him there ; but it seems to me, sir, that the easiest way to solve the mystery would be to bring me face to face with him and allow me to question him myself. That was my chief object in coming.”

“I thank you for reminding me of it. I ought to have thought of it at first,” replied Dr. Valbrègue, without seeming in the least offended. Then turning to the assistant doctor, he said : “Bring Number Nineteen down to us, my dear Bosc.”

“He isn't in the ward. He is walking in the garden.”

“Very well, bring him in, then, but without taking him through the dissecting room. It isn't advisable to shock him by such a sight just as we are about to subject him to a decisive test.” And again turning to André, Dr. Valbrègue added : “Step to the window, my dear sir. You see it looks out upon the garden, and before Bosc goes for your friend, tell me if you see him anywhere among the patients.”

André understood the doctor's motive. The thoughtful practitioner wished to make sure that M. Vernelle's young secretary had not allowed himself to be deceived by a false report. There were several patients in the garden, and seen from a distance, in their long grey cloaks and caps, they all looked exactly alike. “I don't see him,” murmured André.

At last, however, at the end of an almost deserted path, he espied Marbeuf, who was coming slowly towards the window, smoking a cigarette. “There he is ! ” he exclaimed.

“Yes, that is, indeed, our Number Nineteen,” said the doctor, rubbing his hands. “Now we will see what we can gather from the interview.”

“Go, my dear Bosc, but take care not to give him any hint of the truth. I place great dependence upon the effects of the first shock. Tell him some one wants to see him, but don't tell him who it is.”

André was greatly agitated, but not merely by delight at again finding his old friend. The approach of the moment of recognition alarmed him. Marbeuf in all probability would not merely throw himself into his friend's arms. After his first transports of delight, an explanation would ensue, and if it did not come about naturally, Dr. Valbrègue would not fail to ask for it. What would Marbeuf say ? Would he recall the whole story of

the bank-notes, and cast it, so to speak, in his friend's teeth, without paying any heed to the other persons present? There seemed to be good reason to apprehend this. A man who is suddenly aroused from a prolonged sleep is not likely to weigh his words very carefully, but to seize upon the first fact that presents itself to his mind; and if Marbeuf happened to recall the fact that the hundred thousand francs had been intrusted to him, André would at least be then and there convicted of falsehood. The doctor was not a magistrate; he was not endeavouring to discover the culprit in this affair, but he would certainly investigate it carefully in the interests of science. It was too late to shrink from the meeting now, for the assistant doctor had spoken to Marbeuf, and the two were ascending a short flight of steps that led to the room in which Dr. Valbrègue was awaiting them. Moreover, André could not have abandoned his unfortunate friend upon any consideration, so nerving himself for the worst, he went straight towards him, with both hands outstretched, exclaiming in a voice broken with emotion: "I find you at last, my dear Marbeuf, and in such a place! But I have come to take you away."

Dr. Valbrègue and the assistant doctor had kept a little in the background, in order not to interfere with the mental phenomena they were so anxious to watch. They were all eyes and ears, and were not kept waiting long. Instead of taking the hands that Subligny extended to him, the patient recoiled, changed countenance, and murmured as he passed his hand over his forehead: "Marbeuf! Did you say Marbeuf?"

"I ought to have said, 'My dear Louis,' for we have known each other from our childhood."

"Yes; I recollect. Louis Marbeuf. That is my name, but I don't know you at all."

"I am André Subligny."

"André Subligny. Wait a moment. Were you not at Charlemagne College with me?"

"Yes, and in the same class."

"And you afterwards returned to your native town?"

"To Havre, yes. But we have met since then."

"I don't recollect it."

"What, have you forgotten that you insisted upon my accepting your hospitality when I came to Paris, only last month, and that I stayed with you at your rooms in the Rue Lamartine?"

"True. I did live in the Rue Lamartine. I remember now."

"Do you remember, too, the day we dined together at the restaurant?"

"No. I don't recollect that."

André experienced a feeling of profound relief. If Marbeuf did not recollect the dinner, he might not remember about the one hundred thousand francs taken from M. Vernelle's office. Subligny's delight was not in the least selfish, however, for it was not due to any desire that his friend's unfortunate condition should be prolonged. On the contrary, he earnestly hoped that his complete recovery would speedily ensue, though not until he could have a private interview with Marbeuf. "I hear you have lost your memory entirely in consequence of an accident, my dear fellow," continued André—"a fall, probably."

"These gentlemen think so," replied Marbeuf, "but I haven't the slightest idea as to what happened to me."

"But you hold the clue, now that you can recall your name. All the rest will come to you. You certainly know me now, do you not?"

"Yes, I know you, though you have greatly changed since you left college."

"But not since I stayed with you."

"Did you stay with me? Of course I believe it if you say so, but how do my rooms look? I don't remember them at all, or the house either."

"Your rooms are on the fourth floor, and overlook the street. The staircase is narrow, and you have, as a neighbour, a young and very pretty milliner. It was she who recognised you yesterday in the ward."

"Oh, I remember her. She came to see her uncle who occupies the bed opposite mine. It seemed to me then that her face was familiar to me. I said so at the time to this gentleman."

"That is a fact," remarked the assistant.

"But I must have had some employment," said Marbeuf. "What was it?"

"You were employed by Messrs. Pivot and Garnier, in the Rue du Sentier."

"Yes, yes. A vague recollection of the office has haunted me in my lucid moments; and now I can distinctly recall the faces of my employers. Pivot is stout and red-faced; Garnier is as wrinkled as a piece of parchment, and as yellow as a lemon. What did they say when I disappeared? I hope they did not accuse me of making off with any of their money?"

"No, but they have filled your place."

"That doesn't surprise me. A man who leaves his place, loses it."

"You will find another, for you are free now. Dr. Valbrègue will not detain you here any longer."

"Certainly not," said the doctor. "I will sign your discharge, and then this gentleman and myself will take you home."

Marbeuf's face, instead of brightening, suddenly clouded. "What will become of me there?" he muttered. "I shall die of starvation."

"Never, while I live!" exclaimed Subigny. "We are henceforth brothers, my dear Louis. Make an effort, and I am sure that you will remember me perfectly."

"Yes, I remember you now, but what are you doing in Paris?"

This question embarrassed André considerably, although he might have foreseen it. "I am a clerk like yourself," he replied evasively.

"In a mercantile house?"

"At a bank," said André, to avoid uttering a name which might too abruptly remind his friend of his adventure.

"At Monsieur Vernelle's bank, in the Rue Bergère," added the doctor, who had not the same reasons for avoiding names. "Monsieur Subigny is Monsieur Vernelle's private secretary."

"Vernelle!" repeated Marbeuf, closing his eyes, like a man who is trying to recall something. "Wait, oh yes, I know him. I have often had business with his cashier."

André was upon thorns, but he said nothing, for fear of arousing the still dormant memory of Marbeuf, who resumed: "Hadn't you a letter of introduction to deliver to him when you arrived in Paris?"

"I did deliver it to him. He received me very graciously, proposed that I should act as his secretary, and I entered upon my duties the following day."

"You saw him for the first time the day I disappeared? Didn't he give you some commission for me?" inquired Marbeuf, eagerly.

"No, he is not acquainted with you," stammered Subigny, becoming more and more uneasy.

"It is very strange," murmured Marbeuf; "I thought I had the clue for an instant; but suddenly, everything again became a blank." On hearing this, André breathed freely once more.

"My friend," said the doctor, "you will not regain your memory here. While you are in the hospital, little or no light will enter your brain. You must have a change of scene. Some sudden shock would probably do even better. That will come. In the meantime, Monsieur Bosc will prepare your discharge and take you to the dressing-room where you can exchange your hospital garb for the clothes you wore when you were brought here. Pass out through the garden. I must see the director a moment, and I will then join you in the court-yard."

Marbeuf thereupon followed Bosc from the room.

"Ah, well," said the doctor, as soon as he was left alone with André, "you have certainly effected a marvellous cure. It is not complete yet, but it soon will be, for a great progress has been made. My expectations were not fully realised, however. I thought the restoration of your friend's memory would be complete and instantaneous. It has been but partial. The case is all the more interesting on that account, however, and I intend to follow it up to the very end." This announcement was by no means pleasing to André, who dreaded the final awakening under Dr. Valbrègue's vigilant eye, but it did not become him to make any objections to the learned doctor's plans. "Besides, this poor fellow does not interest me solely as a patient," Valbrègue continued. "I am anxious about the condition to which his accident has reduced him. He has lost his situation, and probably has not even money enough to supply his immediate wants. He will re-enter life as destitute as a shipwrecked sailor who has been dashed naked upon the shore. Who knows, indeed, but his former employers will regard him with suspicion on account of his accident? You are his friend, and you will not desert him I'm sure, but I also wish to help him in procuring employment. What a pity that excellent Monsieur Vernelle is reduced to bankruptcy! I am sure that he would have taken the poor fellow into his employ. But unfortunately, that is not to be thought of now."

"Alas, no. In less than a month the house won't be any longer in existence."

"But now I think of it, you, my dear sir, are likely to find yourself in a similar situation, and yet, you seem to think only of your friend. It is very generous of you, and if I can be of service to you, in any way—"

"I am infinitely obliged, to you, sir, for your kind words, but I shall follow Monsieur Vernelle's fortunes. He has been kind enough to promise me his daughter's hand in marriage, and in a few days I shall be his son-in-law."

"Indeed! Ah, well, I congratulate you with all my heart. You must assist Mademoiselle Vernelle in watching over her father's health," added the doctor. "He has just had a narrow escape, and if those dastardly attempts should be repeated, he could not resist them long."

"I should be greatly obliged if you would say nothing to him about my friend Marbeuf's adventure," remarked Subigny. "It would affect him deeply because it concerns me, and it is of the utmost importance that his mind should not be distracted just at the present time."

"That is true. I won't say a word to him upon the subject. But

Number Nineteen must be ready by this time. Come, sir, we will pass out through the surgical ward. You will doubtless prefer that to the dead-room.

André bowed, and followed Dr. Valbrègue. They passed through a long ward like the one Subigny had already visited, with this difference only: nearly all the beds were occupied, although the weather was superb, for the wounded and crippled feel little inclination to hobble about. Marbeuf and the assistant doctor were already waiting in the court-yard—Marbeuf dressed exactly as he had been on leaving the restaurant in the Rue Lafayette, and rejuvenated, transformed, as it were, by his change of apparel. Dr. Valbrègue excused himself for a moment in order to go and inform the director of the departure of the interesting patient; but he soon returned and said: "My carriage is waiting, and I will drive these gentlemen to the Rue Lamartine. I shall not be back to-day, my dear Bosc. I will postpone the autopsy until after my round to-morrow morning."

André would gladly have dispensed with the doctor's company, but it was impossible to offer an objection to the arrangement, so he entered the carriage after giving Marbeuf's address to the doctor, who transmitted it, in turn, to his coachman. Number Nineteen was delighted to breathe the open air of the streets once more. He gazed with apparent interest at the passers-by, but evinced little inclination to talk, either because his sojourn in the hospital had rendered him taciturn, or because he was endeavouring to recall memories, buried in profound oblivion. His silence was a great relief to André, who still dreaded any inopportune return of his friend's memory; and the doctor on his side felt no desire to trouble his patient uselessly. He was waiting for a favourable opportunity to question him.

The coachman had chosen the longest but most practicable route, and the horses were soon trotting briskly along the Boulevard Montparnasse. Just as they were passing the corner of the Rue de Babylone and the Boulevard des Invalides, Dr. Valbrègue remarked to Marbeuf: "You see that high wall over there? It was at the foot of it that you were picked up."

"So I have been told," replied Marbeuf, "but I can't imagine how I happened to be in this neighbourhood. I am acquainted with nobody about here. The neighbourhood isn't at all familiar to me."

"You may have been brought here in a cab."

"Very possibly. It seems to me that I have an indistinct recollection of having been driven about the streets for a long time."

"Why did you never mention this fact to me before? The prefect of police might have discovered the driver who brought you here, for you could not have alighted from his vehicle without his knowledge."

"I did not mention the fact, or rather the impression, before, because it has only just occurred to me."

"And now it is too late. One can't expect a driver to recollect a trip he made more than a month ago. Besides, it is useless to try to interest the police in the matter. Your case is only interesting to the physician. You are my exclusive property, my dear patient; and I trust we shall not lose sight of each other. I shall call on you often, and I hope you will come to my consulting-room at least twice a week. I will let you know the hours at which I receive patients."

"Nothing could afford me greater pleasure, for you have been very kind to me; but I must try to find some way of earning my living."

"Of course, and you can rely upon my assistance. Your friend and myself will obtain you some situation that will suit you, never fear. It

gives me great pleasure to see you show this solicitude in regard to your future. It is a good sign. You are beginning to get your ideas together. You will soon be yourself again. But why don't you try to re-enter the mercantile house in which you were employed prior to your accident?"

"That would be useless. My former employers would not take me back. A merchant always distrusts an employé who may absent himself at any time; and as proof that these gentlemen do not think much of me, they didn't trouble themselves to find out what had become of me."

"Better and better. You reason as if you had never had your skull damaged. Your improvement is rapid; and in a very short time you will again be in full possession of all your faculties, including that of memory. Now, these are my orders for the present; moderate and wholesome nourishment, absolute repose of mind, and plenty of exercise. Walk about the streets, and especially frequent the neighbourhood of the Faubourg Montmartre. It was there that you left your friend, and it was there that your nocturnal adventure must have begun. Who knows but the sight of some insignificant object like a house, a shop, or a street corner, even, may put you on the track."

"It is easy to lounge about when one has nothing to do," muttered Marbeuf; "but eating is quite a different matter."

"I understand that, my dear patient. One cannot live upon air, so I beg that you will allow me to provide for your immediate wants," said Dr. Valbrègue, drawing a five-hundred-franc note from his pocket-book. Then, seeing that Marbeuf seemed disposed to decline taking it, the worthy doctor added, quickly; "It is only a loan. You can repay it as soon as you obtain a situation—repay it in instalments, so you need not inconvenience yourself in the least. Accept this slight service, I beg of you. You will wound me very much if you refuse."

Encouraged by a few words from André, Marbeuf yielded, thanking the doctor warmly, and in well-chosen terms. While this conversation was going on, the carriage had nearly reached its destination. After passing the bridge and the Place de la Concorde, and traversing the Rue Royale, the Rue Tronchet and the Rue du Havre, it was now rolling rapidly along the Rue Saint Lazare, which leads to the Rue Lamartine. "Heaven grant that I may find my furniture safe!" sighed Marbeuf.

"Have no fears. It has not been disturbed," said André. "The commissary of police, who was informed of your absence, sealed your door up."

"It must have been generally supposed that I was dead, then?"

"What else could we think? You had gone away without taking any luggage with you, and without informing the doorkeeper that you would be absent for a month and more. She will take you for a ghost."

As André spoke, the carriage drew up in front of the house.

"Well, my friend, do you recognise your residence?" inquired the doctor.

"Perfectly. It seems to me that I left it only yesterday, though I am very glad to get back to it again. Excuse me if I go up first."

The doctor followed his patient closely, however, and André brought up the rear. In another instant, loud exclamations of astonishment resounded through the hall, as the doorkeeper recognised Marbeuf, and gave vent to her surprise and delight. Marbeuf scarcely noticed her, but hastened on upstairs in order to avoid any explanation, to the great astonishment of mother Hippolyte, who had several things to say to him, and many more to ask him. In fact, she was so amazed that she allowed Dr. Valbrègue

to pass on unchallenged, but when Subligny appeared, she exclaimed : "So you have found him at last ? Where has he come from ?"

"He has been on a journey."

"A strange kind of journey ! He left without any trunk, and in the same clothes he now has on his back, and he took no more notice of me just now than if he had returned from drinking a glass. And I went and reported his disappearance to the commissary of police ! I shall now have to go and tell him that the bird has returned to his cage."

"That isn't necessary. Marbeuf will go himself, and he will tell you about his trip some other time. But tell me, is Mademoiselle Babois at home ?"

"No, she went out some time ago, and hasn't yet returned. That reminds me—she left a message for you."

"What was it ?" inquired Subligny, eagerly.

"She told me to ask you to wait for her, if you came back before she did, and said she would not be gone long. But, my goodness ! she left the house about half an hour after you did, and I have not seen her since. She went out with the stout woman you met on the staircase, her employer, I think. At least, Mademoiselle Babois had a bandbox in her hand. When she comes in, shall I tell her you are upstairs ?"

"Certainly, and you might add that I am very anxious to see her, and that I should be greatly obliged to her if she would knock at Marbeuf's door."

André had, in fact, met a woman on the staircase, but being in great haste, he had scarcely glanced at her ; besides, he had not seen Madame Divet often enough to recognise her readily. However, the doorkeeper's announcement now surprised and alarmed him. "What !" he muttered, as he flew upstairs three steps at a time, to overtake his friend, "can this unfortunate child have really gone out with the woman against whom I had just warned her ? I know she intended to go to the shop, but why did her employer come for her ? Can it have been to draw her into some trap, and then deliver her up to the Russian prince ? It must be now at least four hours since she left the house. What has become of her ? I must find out, with the least possible delay. I will start for the Boulevard Magenta as soon as the doctor leaves ; but no, I must first question Marbeuf, and I cannot do that in Dr. Valbrègue's presence."

On reaching the fourth floor André found the door open, for Marbeuf, encouraged by Dr. Valbrègue, had broken the seals, and was now making the tour of his apartments. He had the triumphant air of an exiled king who has at last returned to his capital, and seemed to feel an almost childish delight in taking an inventory of his treasures. "Here is my writing-table !" he exclaimed, "here is my armchair, and here is my bed ! I shall sleep better here than in Number Nineteen, though that was not an uncomfortable couch, by any means. Here are my engravings, my photographs, and my cuckoo-clock ! Nothing has been disturbed."

"I was the only person who entered the room after your departure," remarked André.

"But look ! my revolver is no longer hanging on the wall !" cried Marbeuf. "Was it you who took it ?"

André blushed. He had entirely forgotten the revolver which Babiole had prevented him from using ; but he now remembered that Chantepie had neglected to return it to him. "Yes," replied Subligny, "I was examining it the evening you left, and forget where I put it, but I will find it again."

The doctor listened, smiling, rejoiced to see his interesting patient regain his mental powers so rapidly. "You are safe now, my friend," he said to him. "Your memory is returning at a gallop, and will soon be entirely restored. It is only a question of a few days, or even hours, now. But I haven't time to await your complete recovery here. Follow my directions implicitly, and call to see me every Wednesday and Saturday, from two to four, at No. 15 Rue Halévy. I leave you in Monsieur Subligny's charge; and to prevent any one from disturbing the quiet of which you stand so much in need, I will notify the commissary of police of your return as I pass his office, and request him not to trouble you. I will tell him your story, and he will understand that he need give himself no further anxiety about you. As for you, monsieur," continued Valbrègue, turning to André, "I need not commend your friend to your care, for I know your devotion to him; but you will kindly remember me to Monsieur Vernelle and his charming daughter? It will afford me very great pleasure to be present at your wedding when it takes place." The physician accompanied these remarks with two hearty handshakes, and the one he gave Marbeuf was none the less cordial from the fact that he felt his patient's pulse as he did so, purely from force of habit. "You have a little fever," he remarked. "It will subside, but remember, there must be no excitement."

With this last bit of advice the physician went off, André accompanying him as far as the landing. On his return, Marbeuf threw himself into his arms. "You have saved my life!" he exclaimed. "I should have died there in the hospital, or rather I should have gone mad."

"It was not I who saved you, but your pretty neighbour. If she had not recognised you yesterday, the idea of going to the hospital to look for you would never have occurred to me. But tell me about yourself. Is it really true that you have forgotten everything?"

"It is true. Can you suppose that I was playing such a trick for the sake of remaining in a place where I had no more freedom than in a prison?"

"No, certainly not. But I thought your memory had perhaps returned since you had seen me; and I felt very grateful to you for saying nothing before Dr. Valbrègue, for he is Monsieur Vernelle's physician."

"I don't understand your meaning very clearly. Can you have anything to conceal from your employer? By the way, you are going to marry his daughter, it seems. That is a piece of good news, surely. You will become his partner one of these days, and then you can give me a place in the house of Subligny & Co."

"Nothing could give me greater pleasure, my friend; but the house is no longer in existence. I shall be married in about a week, but Monsieur Vernelle will be obliged to retire at the end of the month. He has met with tremendous losses lately."

"I am sorry to hear it, for he is a very worthy man."

"And a strictly honest man, I assure you. But is it possible that you have forgotten what I did? I was the chief cause of your misfortune, my poor Louis."

"Nonsense!"

"Listen to me, and I will briefly review the incidents of the last day we spent together. It will be the best way to refresh your memory. Perhaps, though, I had better proceed by questions. Do you recollect my arriving here at five o'clock in the morning?"

"Perfectly. I had prepared a bed for you, you laid down and went to sleep, while I went to the office."

"And you returned in the afternoon to go with me to Monsieur Vernelle's. I had a letter of introduction to deliver to him."

"Yes, I recollect now."

"You accompanied me to his door, and then left me, telling me you would wait for me in a café at the corner of the Rue Drouot."

"Yes, and an hour afterwards, you returned to report that Vernelle had received you very cordially."

"I told you something more: that in a moment of mental aberration, I had put a package of bank-notes in my pocket."

"A package containing one hundred thousand francs!" exclaimed Marbeuf, as if a light had suddenly broke upon his mind.

"Yes, one hundred thousand francs. I desired to make restitution at any cost, but did not know how to do it when you offered to extricate me from my embarrassing position."

"And I took you to a restaurant to dine."

"Where I intrusted the money to you. You were to restore it to Monsieur Vernelle that same evening, and tell him that you had picked it up in the courtyard."

"That is true, I recollect now. And afterwards—"

"Afterwards we left the restaurant and separated. I was to go to your rooms and wait for you. You started off in the direction of the Rue Bergère, and I saw nothing more of you."

"Then you must have suspected me of making off with the money?"

"No, I feared you had been killed and robbed, and I wasn't far from right. Some one did certainly attack you and take the bank-notes from you, as they were not found upon your person when you arrived at the hospital. Try to remember what happened to you, and tell me. Did you go to Monsieur Vernelle's house?"

"It seems to me that I did."

"It is more than probable that you did, for it is not at all likely that you were molested on your way from the Rue Lafayette to the Rue Bergère. It wasn't nine o'clock, and the Faubourg Montmartre was full of people. Still, you did not see Monsieur Vernelle, for I have since learned that he went to the theatre that evening with his daughter."

"I have an indistinct recollection that the doorkeeper told me so."

"Did you start off in search of Monsieur Vernelle?"

"I think not."

"But you were picked up on the Boulevard des Invalides the next morning."

"I cannot imagine how I got there, unless I was taken there in a cab. That is the doctor's idea."

"Did you go into any café or wineshop where you could have been drugged?"

"I am sure I didn't. You had trusted me with one hundred thousand francs, and I was deeply impressed with a sense of my responsibility. I should not have accepted the invitation of any chance acquaintance, or even that of a friend, or have allowed a stranger to engage me in conversation in the street. Some one must have sprung upon me from behind, and dealt me a blow that reduced me to insensibility. But you, my dear André, what were you doing while the money you had confided to me was being stolen? And how did you get out of the scrape in which you must have found yourself? for you must have got safely out of it in some way, as you are about to marry Mademoiselle Vernelle."

"I waited all night for you in vain. At last, despair seized hold of me, and taking down the revolver for which you were inquiring just now, I was about to blow my brains out when your neighbour rapped at the door. She saved my life."

"Good! But what did your employer say the next day, when he discovered that the money was missing?"

"There was no money missing. The cashier had seen me take the bank-notes, and he refunded the amount out of his own pocket."

"The cashier? He must be very rich and very generous, for he was an entire stranger to you."

"It seems that he knew my father. Besides, he made me sign a receipt for the amount. This receipt places me entirely at his mercy, and I now deeply regret having given it to him, for I have no confidence in him. Don't you recollect his dining in the same restaurant, at the table opposite ours?"

"No; but I shall perhaps recall the circumstance later on."

"I shall have only too much occasion to speak of him, I fear; but I must leave you now, my dear Louis."

"Already?"

"Oh, not for any length of time. We will breakfast together to-morrow morning; but to-day my time isn't my own. I have some business that must be attended to immediately, and I am to dine with M. Vernelle this evening."

"Never mind, then. I have plenty to occupy me here and elsewhere. But where are you living now?"

"At No 25, Rue Rougemont; but it is useless for you to trouble about calling for me. I am never there. I will call for you a little before twelve to-morrow. By that time, I hope that your memory will be completely restored. Don't forget the doctor's instructions; and if you see your pretty neighbour before I do, thank her; however, don't say anything to her about the bank-notes."

"You need have no fears of that. I have never been a gossip, and since my adventure I am less than ever inclined to be garrulous."

André shook hands with his friend, and hurried off. He was worried about Babiole, and he had only curtailed the interview because he was anxious to go to the poor girl's help. He had a presentiment that she was in danger, and remembered that he had sworn to save her. In fact, just then, he could think only of her. Mademoiselle Vernelle had been relegated to a secondary place in his thoughts, though he was not in the least conscious of the fact. He rushed downstairs without paying any attention to the questions of the doorkeeper, and jumped into a passing cab in order to reach the Boulevard Magenta more quickly. He little suspected that Babiole was no longer at the house of her unscrupulous employer.

X.

THE opiate administered by Madame Divet must have been very powerful, for Babiole did not wake until noon on the following day. Perhaps, the milliner had not calculated the dose properly; what would merely send a robust man to sleep for a few hours, might kill a delicate girl of sixteen. Still, she had not the slightest desire to really injure Babiole. On the contrary, she was, in her way, really fond of her, and, moreover, she hoped

that she herself would profit considerably by the young girl's grace and beauty. She had thus introduced her to Bertaud, but the latter, although very rich, was both miserly and ugly ; Babiole had from the very first refused to have anything to do with him, and Madame Divet realised that it would be a difficult matter to overcome the girl's prejudices. It thus happened that she had now ventured upon measures that might involve her in trouble with the authorities. Still she had taken her precautions ; having exacted from the prince a promise that Babiole should not be detained against her will. In fact, Madame Divet feared the intervention of the authorities, and did not at all care for the pleasure of sitting in the dock even by the side of a prince of All the Russias.

When Babiole woke up after four-and-twenty hours of her life had thus been stolen from her, she thought she must surely be dreaming. She was lying, completely dressed, upon a large sofa, with her head resting upon a soft cushion. A large fur cloak had been thrown over her, to protect her from the cold—an unnecessary precaution, for a bright fire was blazing on the hearth, and the furnaces that heated the entire house maintained a temperature of seventy degrees, the prescribed temperature in the homes of wealthy Muscovites. Upon a low table that stood within her reach there burned a lamp, the soft light of which was still further subdued by a globe of ground glass. The daylight, which now stole in through the high, stained-glass windows, disclosed to view a richly decorated ceiling, and walls hung with old tapestry. Luxurious chairs of every conceivable shape were scattered about, and there were four low Turkish sofas. In one corner of the room she saw a superb toilet-table, of richly carved rosewood and onyx, while upon another small table there stood a tea-set of Japanese porcelain, and a Russian samovar of burnished copper.

"Where am I?" murmured Babiole, gazing around her. Raising herself on one elbow, she passed her hand across her forehead as if to dispel the clouds that still obscured her thoughts. But she found this a difficult task. Her head was heavy; the blood rushed to her temples, and her eyes would close, in spite of all her efforts to keep them open. Suddenly, however, her memory returned to her. "Yes," she gasped, "I remember now: Madame Divet came for me. She insisted upon taking me home with her, and after we got there I was suddenly taken ill, and afterwards—I don't know—I probably fell asleep, and was brought here. What house is this? I never saw anything so beautiful. It is like a palace."

She threw back the fur cloak that covered her, and set her little feet upon a carpet as soft and thick as woodland moss. Then only did she understand the truth. "The prince!" she exclaimed. "I am his prisoner. That vile woman has delivered me into his hands—but I will die rather than yield to him! I will leave the house this instant."

She rose up and tried to take a few steps, but her limbs tottered under her, and she was obliged to lean against the wall for support. She looked around her for a door, but saw none. The tapestry probably concealed one from sight ; however, perceiving a bell-rope near her, she pulled it violently. Almost at the same instant a woman appeared, and asked obsequiously : "Did Mademoiselle ring?"

She spoke as quietly as if she had been in Babiole's service for years, and had only been awaiting this signal to enter her mistress's presence. She was a middle-aged woman, and she had a prepossessing face. Babiole attempted to advance towards her, and, as she did so, she sternly asked : "Who are you?"

"I am at mademoiselle's orders," replied this strange maid, in the most respectful tone possible.

"Very well, then, open every door for me. I will not remain here a moment longer."

"Mademoiselle is in no condition to leave the house. Mademoiselle is too ill. Mademoiselle had better allow me to put her in bed."

"Open the doors, as I bid you." As Babiole spoke she took a few steps forward, and extended her hand to push the woman aside; but she had over-estimated her strength, for she staggered, and fell fainting into the arms of the maid.

When she again opened her eyes, she found herself upon a large, canopied bed, in another apartment. The maid had evidently carried her there and undressed her; she was now holding a bottle of smelling salts to her nostrils. Babiole repulsed her with a gesture of loathing; but the rebuff was received with exemplary humility. The attendant was evidently accustomed to servitude. "Mademoiselle is in great need of rest," she said, in a gentle voice; "that is why I took the liberty of putting mademoiselle to bed; and, as my presence seems to annoy mademoiselle, I will retire. Mademoiselle will find everything she needs on this little table by the bed; and if she wishes me to return, she has only to ring."

Then she tiptoed cautiously out of the room, leaving Babiole to her reflections. The poor child's brain was on fire, and her imagination, instead of becoming calmer, grew more and more excited. She was a prisoner—there was no longer any possible doubt of that—and closely guarded. The slave was not far off, and the master was probably at hand. Babiole even felt surprised that he had not shown himself before now; and she wondered, with a shudder, what was likely to be her fate.

She would gladly have given her life to escape from this house; but how could she hope to do so? It was not likely that the Russian prince's servants would allow her to leave; but even if they made no attempt to stop her, she would not have strength to reach the street. "If I could only find some means of killing myself!" she murmured, as she endeavoured to raise herself to a sitting posture.

She finally succeeded in doing so, and at the same moment her eyes fell upon a small vial filled with a dark liquid which, upon examination, proved to be laudanum. This poison might serve as a last resource, she thought, so she hastily concealed the bottle under her pillow. Then a trifle reassured, she endeavoured to recollect what had occurred at Madame Divet's. More fortunate than Marbeuf, she finally succeeded in recalling the events which had led to her present perilous position. She recollected that her employer had given her something to drink which she had poured out in an adjoining room, and she could not doubt but what the beverage had been drugged. Babiole had not forgotten her intention of calling upon her employer and resigning her situation, but such a visit would probably have been a short one, and the highly-incensed lady would not have been likely to offer her guest any refreshments.

In fact, it took poor Babiole a long time to recollect the dodge by which her employer had managed to entice her to her house, and as the truth dawned upon her mind, she remembered André's situation and the letter concealed in her purse. She trembled, lest it might have been taken from her, and despite her weakness she dragged herself out of bed to a chair, on which her dress was lying. The purse was in her pocket and the letter safe inside. Thus reassured, she slipped her purse under her pillow, as she had

done with the vial of laudanum, and went to bed again. Ah ! if she could only escape she would still be able to save André. But his wedding would take place in a week or so, and who knew how long her detention would last. Besides, her fever was increasing, and her effort to rise had exhausted her completely. She trembled like a leaf shaken by the wind ; her temples throbbed, and her thoughts were becoming confused. "If delirium should seize me I am lost !" she thought.

At the same time, she said to herself that the Russian prince certainly would not be so inhuman as to allow her to die without medical attendance ; that he would not refuse her permission to summon a physician, and that this physician—no matter how unfeeling he might be—would surely take her under his protection. She was about to ring for her attendant, and request her to send for a doctor, when the prince entered the room. Babiole recognized him instantly, though he now wore a rather odd costume. He was dressed à la Tartare, in a silk shirt, an embroidered caftan, flowing cassock, trousers, and tiptilted Turkish slippers. "Ah, well, my pretty one," he began, stroking his grey moustache, "you are really ill, I hear. You look none the less charming, however. Still, I mean to punish that old hussy as she deserves, for making you swallow that drug to send you to sleep. Had she possessed a particle of tact, she wouldn't have been obliged to resort to such means, I am sure."

Babiole was magnificent to behold. Her eyes flashed fire, and the anger that transfigured her face restored both her courage and presence of mind. "I forbid you to address another word to me !" she cried, imperiously.

"Nonsense !"

"Do you suppose that I will consent to remain here a moment longer ?"

"I certainly hope so. This house is yours for a year ; and at the end of that time we will see. Perhaps I will then make you a present of it. You shall have the furniture, in any case. You will also receive three hundred louis per month ; and here is the first instalment," added the Russian, placing six one-thousand-franc notes on the table. Babiole snatched them up, and sent them flying across the room. "So your resistance is serious !" exclaimed the prince. "Ah, well ! I like you all the better for it. I adore girls of spirit."

"You are an infamous scoundrel ! I am a child of the people, and yet I have far more nobility of soul than you ; and I despise you, for you have behaved in a most cowardly manner. You set a trap for me ; I fell into it, and you think I am at your mercy. You are mistaken. Keep your gold for shameless creatures ! You can torture me, you can kill me if you like ! I will die defying you, and my death will be avenged ! You may be sure of that."

"Torture you—kill you ! I should certainly be very sorry to do anything of the kind. Do you really take me for a barbarian ? I sha'n't compel you to accept a fortune, any more than I shall compel you to remain here."

"Do you mean to say that you won't oppose my leaving the house ?"

"Oh ! I have no desire to get myself into trouble with the authorities of your country. But if you do go, you will certainly regret it ; so I beg you will consider the matter well before you decide."

"My decision is already made. I shall leave the house, and at once."

"Come, calm yourself, let us have a little chat," said the prince, persuasively. "Remember that this is a question that affects your future. If I promised never to leave you, couldn't you be induced to listen to reason ?

It is in your power to make yourself independent for life ; and if you would like to travel, I will take you to Russia, and perhaps marry you, by-and-bye ; who knows ? Besides, before you leave France, I will settle an income of twenty-five thousand francs upon you. It is agreed, is it not ? ”

As he spoke, the prince came a little nearer. However, Babiole hastily uncorked the vial of laudanum she held in her hand, raised it to her lips, and, casting a look of withering scorn and contempt upon the prince, firmly exclaimed : “ If you come one step nearer, I will kill myself ! ”

“ What have you there ? ” stammered the prince, in evident consternation.

“ It is poison ! ” Babiole answered, coldly. “ A few drops of it would only stupefy me, and place me again at your mercy ; but if you approach any nearer, I will drain the bottle to the dregs. There is enough, and more than enough, to kill me. ”

The prince drew back, and his tone instantly changed. He had noted the girl’s expression of indomitable resolution, and his passion did not blind him to the inevitable consequences of the suicide with which she threatened him. “ Calm yourself, mademoiselle, ” he said, soothingly. “ I assure you that I deeply regret what has passed, and that I have not the slightest intention of detaining you against your will. But you are not yet sufficiently recovered to leave the house ; so I will retire after giving orders to summon a physician. As soon as he assures you that you can safely leave, you may do so. ”

Babiole intended to avail herself of this permission without delay ; so, as soon as the prince left the room, she attempted to rise, but her head fell back upon the pillow, and there it remained. The intense excitement prompted by her anger had given place to a nervous prostration that deprived her almost of the power to think, or move a finger. She was in that state of torpor which often precedes delirium, and while she was thus drifting towards a dangerous illness, the prince was holding a stormy interview in another room with Madame Divet. The latter, anxious as to the upshot of the disgraceful intrigue in which she had engaged, had called at a most unfortunate moment, for the prince was furious, and very naturally felt a desire to vent his wrath upon his accomplice. “ So this is the way you serve me, you infamous hussy ! ” he exclaimed, savagely. “ A fine scrape you have got me into with a girl who hurls my money in my face, and threatens to poison herself. ”

“ I warned your excellency that she wasn’t easy to deal with, ” was the reply. “ Besides, I merely meddled with the matter to oblige your excellency—and the Baroness d’Orbec. ”

“ She may go to Hades ! ”

“ She leaves, this evening, for Monaco, which amounts to about the same thing, possibly. ”

“ Then you had better go with her ! I will never set eyes on her again while I live. As for this girl, you must get her out of the house as soon as you can ; I am not going to run any further risk for the sake of any Frenchwoman. If the baroness is really a married woman, as I heard last night at the club, I have plenty of trouble on my hands already ; for her husband may bring proceedings against me, and this she-tiger here is quite capable of denouncing me to the authorities. ”

“ These caprices cost one dear in Paris, prince. ”

“ That is very possible ; but if you don’t get me out of this scrape, I swear that this affair shall cost you even dearer than it does me. ”

"But how can your excellency expect me to get you safely out of the scrape, when I don't even know what you have decided to do? I warn you, however, that if you attempt to detain this girl against her will, I shall wash my hands of the whole affair. The penalty for such an offence is several years' imprisonment, and I am not anxious for that, I assure you."

"In other words, you would denounce me. You are quite capable of it. If we were in Russia, I would have you flogged to death."

"But we are not in Russia, thank Heaven!"

"Hold your tongue, viper, and get this girl home. She has promised me that she will say nothing if I let her go; but I don't trust her."

"Nor do I; besides, she has an admirer who came to see me last night, and kicked up a terrible row about her strange disappearance," said Madame Divet, impelled by a desire to increase her companion's perturbation, and enhance the value of her services.

"Ah!" cried the prince. "Well, try and make the fellow hold his tongue, and you shall have all the money I promised you."

"Then shall I take the girl away at once?"

"You can't do that, I fancy. I fear she's ill, at least she looks like it."

"Will your excellency allow me to see her?" asked Madame Divet.

"You can do whatever you like, providing you never mention her name to me again."

"But if she grows worse, shall I send for a physician?"

"Of course. I wouldn't have her die here for the world!"

"Very well. I know a physician we can trust."

"Then send for him. If he asks any questions, tell him whatever you please, as long as you do not mention my name. I shall never set foot in this accursed house again. Olga, the chamber-maid, can remain here to wait on the girl. Make such arrangements as may seem best to you, and get her well as soon as possible. I took the house for a year; but as soon as the girl is out of it, it will afford me great pleasure to return the keys to the owner. In the meantime, I shall take up my quarters at the Continental Hotel. My majordomo will accompany me, so you will only have Olga to manage. She is devoted to me, and can be relied upon implicitly."

"Then all will go well, for your excellency can rely upon me with equal certainty."

"I rely upon never setting eyes on you again; I will make arrangements to hear from you every day; and as soon as I am satisfied that you have kept your engagement, my steward will give you the money I promised you. Remain here, and I will send Olga to you."

"This is what one gets for working for Cossacks!" muttered Madame Divet, as the prince disappeared. "Here is a man who was ready to set Paris on fire for Babiole's sake, but who slinks away like a whipped cur just because she puts on a few airs. He treats me nicely, after all I have done for him! Upon my word, I believe I would rather deal with that boor of a Bertaud. One doesn't run the risk of being dragged before the Assizes with him. I ought to have asked the Russian at least fifty thousand francs for getting him out of this scrape."

Madame Divet's soliloquy was interrupted by the entrance of the maid whom the prince had selected to wait upon Babiole. The two women looked at each other as augurs are said to have looked at one another when they met in the streets of ancient Rome. They measured each other at a glance, and they would have exchanged meaning smiles had they dared; but, determined not to be out-done in mutual respect, they began to dis-

cuss the matter gravely. "What do you think of the young lady's condition?" inquired Madame Divet. "The prince wishes her to be taken away; and if I could remove her at once—"

"That would be the best course," replied Olga. "I judged her character aright as soon as she awoke, but she is not able to sit up. Indeed, I fear that she is already very ill."

"The prince says I may see her, and send for a physician, if necessary."

"So he informed me, madame; and I will take you to her at once."

A moment later, these exemplary creatures entered the room where Babiole was lying, and found her in a truly alarming condition. The poor child had not moved since the prince's departure, and seemed to be utterly devoid of consciousness.

"Ah, well, little one, how do you feel?" inquired Madame Divet.

Babiole opened her eyes, recognised her employer, and shrinking from her with a gesture of loathing, murmured faintly: "Leave me! I hate you! Leave me, I say!"

"She is delirious," muttered Madame Divet.

"She used almost the same words to me," remarked Olga.

"André—the letter—I must see him!" continued Babiole.

"She is really ill. Her brain seems to be affected," said Madame Divet.

"Her condition is even critical, I am afraid. My physician lives a long way off. Do you know of any in this neighbourhood?"

Olga answered affirmatively, and went off to summon him, leaving Madame Divet alone with the sick girl. Noticing that Babiole held something tightly clasped in her hands, she opened them, and found in one the vial of laudanum, and in the other the girl's purse. "I'll take the poison and put it in a safe place," she muttered. "It isn't right to leave such dangerous drugs within a young girl's reach. What would have become of us if she had taken it? But why does she keep such a tight hold on her purse? Can she be afraid it will be stolen from her? Oh, no, I remember, it contains the letter to Madame Vernelle. Upon my word I shall let Babiole keep it." Thereupon she slipped the purse under the pillow on which the girl's head reclined, and murmured: "Heaven grant that she won't have an attack of brain-fever! That would interfere sadly with our plans."

Although Madame Divet had never studied medicine, her diagnosis of the case was only too correct. Babiole's malady was indeed one of those violent attacks of brain-fever which so often follow any intense strain upon the nerves, and which generally prove fatal. The patient struggles more or less successfully, according to his or her age and vigour of constitution; but the physician can do little or nothing.

The practitioner that Olga brought back with her proved to be a fashionable physician who resided in the vicinity of the Parc Monceau. Accustomed to the whims of the wealthy, he was discreet, as much from self-interest as from a sense of professional duty. He made no inquiries in regard to his new patient, or as to the circumstances which had made her an inmate of this luxurious mansion. Whatever responsibility there was in the matter fell upon the prince, in whose name he had been summoned. He attended the girl faithfully, however, not sparing his visits, though he had the good sense not to give her too much medicine. The first few days, and especially the first few nights, were terrible. The poor child was a prey to the wildest delirium; and night after night it seemed as if she must succumb to the violence of the fever. Olga never left her; and in

order to carry out the prince's instructions, she had a bed brought into the sick-room for her own use. As for Madame Divet, alarmed by the report of the doctor, who had declared at the outset that he could not vouch for Babiole's recovery, she left the house, but called every morning to make inquiries.

Olga met her at the door without inviting her in, and on the fourth day, in compliance with her master's orders, she requested her not to repeat her visits. Thereupon Madame Divet, crestfallen and anxious, returned home, where she remained awaiting the progress of events without being disturbed by any one; the prince had no desire to see her again; the baroness had left Paris, and André, engrossed, probably, by other matters, did not return to the establishment.

Babiole had relapsed into a state of complete insensibility. She no longer recognised any one, and when she woke from her stupor, it was only to ramble on in the most incoherent manner. She called for her mother; she talked about André; she anathematised Madame Divet; but all this incoherent talk had no apparent meaning, and the doctor, accustomed to delirium in all violent cases, attached no importance to the girl's words. Olga herself understood little or nothing of what she said, having no knowledge whatever of Babiole's past life. Matters went on in this way for one whole week; then a slight change for the better became apparent in the patient's condition. In this struggle between youth and disease, youth gradually gained the ascendancy. The paroxysms of fever occurred at longer intervals, and became less violent, and the mist that obscured the sick girl's intellect slowly faded away. An utter prostration followed this state of intense nervous excitement, and for several days Babiole was incapable of making the slightest movement; indeed, she scarcely had strength to think. However, the physician declared that all danger had passed, and that careful nursing and quiet alone were needed to insure complete recovery.

This second state lasted several days, Babiole all the while slowly regaining strength, though still unable to talk. She did not reject Olga's attentions. She accepted from her hand the various nourishing broths that the physician prescribed, but to the maid's almost affectionate questions, she only responded by signs. One would have supposed she desired time for reflection, before resuming the conversation interrupted by her sudden attack of illness. This, in fact, was not far from the truth. Babiole was endeavouring to recall all that had occurred. Her interview with the prince alone stood out clearly in her memory, and as she had not seen him since, she began to feel confident that he would keep his promise and allow her to leave the house. However, it was only after long efforts, that she recollected André's situation, and the terrible letter in her purse. She had found the latter, and now had but one idea, that of making her escape from the house. However, not being fully satisfied of her nurse's friendly intentions, she carefully refrained, not only from announcing her determination, but even from giving the slightest hint of it. She did thank Olga for her care, but without making any comment on the conduct of the prince, or saying a word about the past; and she did not ask a single question as to the nature of her illness, or the particulars of the crisis through which she had passed. She confined herself to expressing a desire to get up and walk about her room a little, as soon as the physician would permit it; and the desire met with no opposition. The doctor, when consulted by Olga, even declared that exercise would be very beneficial, if proper caution was observed. Babiole was first to walk about her room, then

about the house, and then in the garden, after which she might be allowed to drive out.

Olga made no objection, so, on the following day, Babiole carried out the doctor's instructions by taking several turns about her room. She had the satisfaction of finding that her limbs would sustain her, so the very next day she asked to be allowed to go out into the open air. Olga herself accompanied her into the garden connected with the house, lent her the support of her arm, during a short promenade up and down one of the walks, and finally seated her on a bench in the sun, promising to return for her in an hour's time.

The garden was small, and merely separated from the Parc Monceau by an iron gate, and, for the first time since her imprisonment, Babiole knew where she was, for she had neglected to question her attendant upon this point. This reserve had been intentional, Babiole wishing Olga to have no suspicions of her wish to go off; for even if Olga did not oppose the project, she would probably offer to accompany her, and such an arrangement would not have suited Babiole, who wished to see André before returning to her home in the Rue Lamartine. Everything seemed to indicate that Babiole had been left entirely alone with Olga, for on going down into the garden she had seen no other servant, nor any sign of life about the mansion. Rising up, she approached the gate, and was delighted to find that it opened from the inside, and that the key was in the lock. The opportunity was a tempting one. Why should she wait for another day? Unfortunately she was not dressed to go out. On rising, she had merely put on a long wrapper and a pair of Turkish slippers; and to protect herself effectually from the air, she had thrown round her a peculiar garment that could hardly fail to attract attention—a sort of Russian pelisse, taken by Olga from the prince's wardrobe—a long, fur-trimmed garment, with a hood and flowing sleeves. But what did that matter after all? To make her escape, she would gladly have traversed the streets of Paris in masquerade costume, so she might certainly make the venture in a cab in spite of her odd attire.

The question was, would she have strength to reach the nearest cab-stand. She finally resolved to make the attempt. It was early spring-time. The trees were already in bloom, but the air was keen, and at that season of the year, the Parc Monceau is well-nigh deserted early in the morning. Babiole crossed the park with no other incident than a meeting with several nurses, who laughed on seeing her pass with the hood of her cloak drawn down over her face, and dragging her slippers after her. The fresh air strengthened her, and hope sustained her. But would she see André in time? She did not know how many days had elapsed while she was hovering between life and death, nor had she any idea what day of the month it was; but she dared not question the policemen on duty in the park, for they were already gazing at her in astonishment, and, indeed, with an air that indicated strong doubts of her sanity.

At the corner of the Boulevard de Courcelles, however, she saw a newspaper stand, and the idea of purchasing a journal, and in that way discovering what she wished to know, occurred to her. The paper she bought bore the date of March 29th. She had been a prisoner exactly a fortnight, and André had told her that his marriage would take place before the expiration of the month. Babiole nearly swooned upon making this discovery. But this was no time for weakness. A moment's delay might cost André dear. Summoning all her strength, she succeeded in

keeping upon her feet, and an empty cab chancing to pass a moment afterwards, she beckoned to the driver, and entered the vehicle, after giving André's address. She alone could tell the agony she endured during the drive.

When the cab at last drew up in the Rue Rougemont, she was scarcely able to alight from it and to inquire for M. Subligny of the doorkeeper, who, after subjecting her to an insolent stare, replied : " You are unlucky, my girl. Monsieur Subligny wouldn't see you on a day like this, and you must have plenty of assurance to intrude upon him."

Under any other circumstances Babiole would not have allowed the doorkeeper to address her in this impertinent manner, but she was resolved to see André at any cost, so she said : " I am sure that Monsieur Subligny will see me if you will tell me how to find my way to his rooms."

" I tell you that you cannot see him," was the response. " You needn't take the trouble to go upstairs. It will do no good. You'll only have to come down again."

" Why, is he ill ? " inquired the girl, anxiously.

" Ill ? Well, that's a good joke ! This certainly would be a bad day for him to fall ill. He is as well and hearty as possible, very fortunately, for he is to be married this morning."

" This morning ! " repeated Babiole.

" The news seems to upset you rather, though I don't see why, for you certainly could not expect a handsome young man like him to remain single for ever." Then, seeing that Babiole had turned as pale as death, the doorkeeper continued : " You must be one of his old flames, as the news has such an effect upon you. So he has jilted you, eh ? "

" Married, he is married ! " Babiole answered, in consternation.

" No, not yet. He left the house only about twenty minutes ago in a carriage, and a fine carriage it was. They say his prospective father-in-law is a ruined man, but he does things handsomely for all that."

" Twenty minutes ago. Then there may still be time for me to see him. Where is he to be married ? "

" That is more than I am going to tell you. I see what you are after, my girl. You would like to make a scene with the lover who has jilted you. You need not expect any help from me, however, for the young man has always treated me very handsomely. Why, only just now, before he left, he gave me ten francs, and I am not going to let you give him any trouble."

" I assure you that I haven't the slightest intention of doing so—quite the contrary."

" Bah ! I know you. It is for his good, of course, that you are anxious to swoop down upon him in the middle of the ceremony. Go and tell that to the marines, my dear."

" I wish to save him," pleaded Babiole.

" Save him ! pooh ! Well, run after him, if you choose ; for even if you find out where he has gone, no great harm will be done, for you won't be admitted, dressed as you are. I wonder you are not ashamed to be seen gadding about Paris in such a garment as that." And re-entering his room, the fellow shut the door in Babiole's face.

The poor girl staggered, as she turned away, and it was with no little difficulty that she finally succeeded in regaining the street. Overwhelmed by this news and worn out with suffering, she scarcely had strength to walk, and yet her will sustained her.

She had not abandoned all hope of preventing the marriage, but the insolent doorkeeper had obstinately refused to give her any information in regard to it. Suddenly a happy thought occurred to her. M. Vernelle's house was at the corner of the next street. The servants there would not refuse to tell her what she wished to know. She beckoned the driver to follow her, and dragged herself along to the banker's door, heedless of the sneering smiles of the passers-by. At M. Vernelle's house she was met by a polite servant who recognized her from having seen her a fortnight before, and who probably recollected that his master had received her, for without displaying much astonishment at her strange costume, he informed her that M. Vernelle and his daughter had just left for the municipal offices in the Rue Drouot.

This news was encouraging. The marriage had not yet taken place. Throwing herself into the cab again, she implored the coachman to drive as fast as possible, strengthening this entreaty by the promise of a liberal gratuity; but she was at the mercy of a superannuated steed insensible to the stimulus of the whip. The Rue Drouot is certainly not far from the Rue Bergère, but the bridal party was at least twenty minutes in advance of her, and the ceremony does not last long. Still, it not unfrequently happens that the mayor keeps the party waiting.

Babiole longed for wings, but the horse crept along at the same snail's pace, and the nearer the poor girl approached the goal, the more she despaired of success. At last the vehicle drew up at a short distance from the municipal building, and Babiole alighted. Three handsome landaus, a little further on, were evidently waiting for the bridal party; consequently, the ceremony could not be over.

Babiole hastened on, without even glancing at any one. Her strange costume attracted the attention of some policemen, but one is not obliged to be in full dress to gain admission into a mayor's office, so no one stopped her or inquired what she wanted. A gentleman who was just leaving the office of the justice of the peace, near the end of the hall, told her where the civil ceremony of marriage was celebrated, and she unhesitatingly climbed the staircase to the first floor. Guided by an inscription, she at last reached a large apartment crowded with people. She looked for the bridal couple she was in search of, but at first she only beheld strange faces. That day there were no fewer than three wedding parties awaiting the arrival of the mayor. At the further end of the apartment, was a platform surmounted by a bust of the Republic, but the mayor's chair was not yet occupied.

Babiole breathed again. There is still time. All she had to do now was to speak to André; but this was no easy matter, for she did not even see him. She thought he must be in a group that had gathered in front of the platform, but from the doorway she could not distinguish the faces of the party.

It would be necessary to step inside, but she dared not. However, by straining her eyes, she finally succeeded in recognising M. Vernelle, who was talking with two gentlemen she had never seen before—witnesses to his daughter's marriage, probably. They were standing; while Made-moiselle Vernelle was seated between two ladies—friends of the family, no doubt. A few intimate connections who had remained faithful to the banker in his adversity, alone were there. André, who had but few acquaintances in Paris, must be even more isolated. Babiole finally discovered him standing in the embrasure of a window, at some distance from

his betrothed, and accompanied by two gentlemen, one of whom was Louis Marbeuf.

The opportunity was a good one, and resolving to take advantage of it, she started towards André, keeping between the benches and the wall, but so great was her weakness, that she was obliged to pause more than once. She held the fatal letter in her hand, and meant to give it to Subigny without more ado, feeling that she herself would not have strength to speak. She was halfway across the room when suddenly a door, behind the platform, opened and a man entered carrying a copy of the Civil Code which he placed on the table in front of the mayor's arm-chair. The mayor himself was evidently about to arrive, for M. Vernelle approached his daughter who rose up and André joined them. Babiole had but a moment left to avert the calamity. Gathering up her strength she approached despairingly, but as she suddenly stumbled, her hood fell from her head disclosing her pallid face. Marbeuf recognised her, and divining some scandal, hurried to her side. "You unfortunate girl, what brings you here?" he asked.

"I must speak to Monsieur Subigny," gasped Babiole.

"No, no, you must go— There must be no scene here," said Marbeuf, who had greatly changed since the time when he was an inmate of the Necker Hospital.

"No, I will not go," said Babiole, "I have a letter to give your friend. Call him here— I won't speak to him, but merely hand him the note."

André had just caught sight of Babiole and had become very pale. He mistook her intentions, like Marbeuf had done, but he thought it best to intervene and have an explanation with her. So drawing near he hurriedly exclaimed, "I did not expect to see you here. What do you desire of me?"

Babiole handed him the letter, murmuring: "Read this, I beseech you— read it and afterwards—you will do as you please."

André, fairly stupefied, took the letter and exclaimed: "But this is my father's handwriting. What does it all mean?"

"Read, and forgive me," gasped Babiole tottering.

The scene was a strange one. M. Vernelle and his daughter witnessed it from a distance. Clémence, who had recognised Babiole, gave her father a questioning glance. Marbeuf was grinding his teeth, the other persons present looked bewildered, and André, who was perusing the letter, had become ghastly pale. Big tears coursed down his cheeks when he had finished reading. "Who gave you this letter?" he asked in a husky voice.

"A woman who holds all your father's correspondence with Madame Vernelle," replied Babiole without the least hesitation. "I couldn't bring it sooner. I was a prisoner, but I escaped and dragged myself here."

A buzz amid the throng announced the arrival of the mayor. "Come, you are wanted," exclaimed Marbeuf who failed to understand his friend's emotion.

André turned round in despair. The mayor, wearing his sash of office, stood on the platform. Clémence on her father's arm hesitated to advance. All eyes were fixed upon the bridegroom who behaved so strangely. He had fairly lost his head and no wonder. It was too late to enter into any explanation with Monsieur Vernelle. What should he do? He thought of rushing from the room, but Marbeuf pushed him towards the platform and as he stood in front of Clémence, the mayor began to read the clauses of the Code, respecting the duties of matrimony.

"How frightful!" gasped Babiole in consternation.

Marbeuf barred her way, believing that she had gone mad; and meanwhile, silence having been restored, the mayor raised his voice and asked: "André Charles Subigny, do you consent to take Clémence Claire Vernelle for your lawful wife?"

A loud "No!" was the response. It fell upon the room like a thunder-clap; and many of the people present imagined they had not heard aright. Others thought that the bridegroom, agitated by the solemnity of the ceremony, had answered the contrary of what he intended. But Clémence was not mistaken, and she fainted in her father's arms.

With the look of an executioner, who had just dealt the fatal blow with the axe, André strode away followed by Marbeuf, who was in dismay, and would willingly have wrung Babiole's neck. But she had gone. She had darted from the room amid the jeers of the by-standers, who considered her to be the sole cause of the scandal. A few ladies pitied her as a jilted girl is pitied. But no one imagined that by her courageous intervention she had averted a great moral, if not a legal crime. In the eyes of the law, Clémence was the banker's daughter; but Madame Vernelle had deceived her husband, and of all those present only Babiole and André knew the terrible truth.

Overcome by her heroic effort, Babiole had dragged herself to her cab; and she now drove to the Rue Lamartine, where fresh trials awaited her. The doorkeeper burst into loud exclamations on beholding her, and left her room for the express purpose of overwhelming her with questions and reproaches. Where had she come from, and what had she been doing during her fortnight's absence? this was a respectable house, and a girl who conducted herself in such a manner, must expect to be requested to move. Besides, Uncle Auguste had been there, and on hearing that his niece had been absent from her home so long, he had openly declared that he would have nothing more to do with her except to have her sent to some reformatory when she returned. She was a minor, and he was her guardian, so he had a perfect right to put a stop to such disgraceful freaks.

Babiole listened to this torrent of reproaches in silence, and without making any attempt to vindicate herself. She had made up her mind beforehand to bear the penalty of her devotion to André, so she went upstairs without replying. It was for André's sake that she had sacrificed herself—for his sake alone—for she had only consented to accompany Madame Divet home in the hope of securing a letter which would enable her to save him. It was no fault of hers that her infamous employer had betrayed her confidence, and delivered her over to a libertine, from whom she had only escaped by a miracle. Her honour was safe, it is true, but she had good reason to fear that her good name was irretrievably compromised, while she had not even the consolation of being able to look upon André as a grateful friend. Perhaps he cursed her; at all events, he would never willingly set eyes on her again. There seemed to be nothing left for her but to die.

She locked herself in her rooms, fell sobbing upon a chair, and buried her tear-stained face in her hands.

So this was her reward for all her sufferings, and for the risk she had run in order to save the man she loved from eternal remorse. She did not regret what she had done—she only regretted that her illness had not proved fatal; and, in her secret heart, she hoped that a relapse would remove her from a world in which there no longer seemed to be any place for her.

She had been weeping a long while, when a violent pull of the bell made her start. Could it be André who had come to see her at such a time? She ran to the door and opened it. Marbeuf entered, his face flushed with anger. "Wretched girl! What have you done?" he exclaimed.

"Was it André who sent you here?" she inquired.

"I have not seen him since the catastrophe you brought down upon us. He fled like a madman, and I should not be surprised if he has gone to drown himself. Monsieur Vernelle is nearly frantic with grief, for his daughter is at the point of death. All this is your work."

"Question Monsieur Subigny. He will tell you why I acted as I did; and if he has any feeling he will take my defence."

"Defend yourself, and tell me what was in that letter you handed him?"

"Never!" cried Babiole. "It is his secret, I cannot reveal it to you."

"He has no secrets from me."

"Well, he will tell it you. Don't insist; but when you see your friend, you may assure him that he will never see me or hear of me again. Now, I need rest, and I must beg of you to leave me."

Marbeuf, somewhat disconcerted by this firm reply, sullenly complied with her request, and Babiole, after again slipping the bolt, murmured to herself: "André, I saved your life, and yet you are killing me. I shall die of grief, but I love you, I love you, and my last thought will be of you!"

XI.

ANDRÉ had cut the Gordian knot in the mayor's office for want of time to untie it; but it does not always suffice to amputate the limb of an injured man to save him. The poor fellow could not give any satisfactory explanation to Mademoiselle Vernelle and her father. The scandal had been a frightful one, and Clémence had not recovered from the shock, which had so nearly killed her upon the spot. Her father, who must be deeply incensed by André's conduct, would not lower himself to ask for explanations; Madame Subigny, who had come from Havre expressly to attend her son's wedding, had not understood anything of the scene, and André could not reveal the truth to her. To whom could he apply for assistance in extricating himself from this intolerable position?

Babiole knew the truth, but she could do nothing. Vernelle would refuse to grant her an interview, for he must regard her with suspicion. Clémence had recognised her at the mayor's office, and no doubt believed that André was in love with her. Marbeuf might possibly consent to serve as an ambassador, and try to vindicate his friend; but Marbeuf would scarcely exercise any influence, for M. Vernelle, who was not acquainted with him personally, but was aware of his prolonged sojourn in the hospital, might consider him to be a sort of madman, upon whose words little or no reliance could be placed. After long reflection André finally thought of Dr. Valbrègue, who seemed to him to be the most suitable person to enlighten the father and daughter respecting all the facts of the case. A physician is a sort of father confessor; one can confide anything to him, and Dr. Valbrègue had seemed to take not only a friendly interest in his patient, the banker, but also in the young secretary who had assisted him so much in accomplishing the cure of his remarkable patient. Of late times Dr. Valbrègue had not lost sight of Marbeuf. He had insisted upon a continuance of his visits, and on each occasion he had subjected him to a fresh

examination, still hoping to discover the nature of the accident that had destroyed the memory of this remarkable patient. If the doctor failed to secure any definite information on this point, the report he counted upon making to the Academy of Medicine would necessarily remain incomplete.

Unfortunately, Marbeuf was, as regards memory, in the same mental condition as on the day of his departure from the hospital. He had regained complete possession of all his other faculties ; he was looking for a situation, and was as capable of filling the position of accountant as formerly, but he could recollect little, prior to the time of his admission into the hospital. He did, certainly, recollect rather more than he was willing to admit to the doctor. André had reminded him of the incidents that had preceded the accident, but Marbeuf was obliged to remain silent on this subject, under penalty of injuring his friend ; besides, these facts threw no light upon what had afterwards happened to him. Still, Dr. Valbrègue did not despair. Sometimes he even thought strongly of adopting the plan suggested by his assistant : that of taking Marbeuf about the streets of Paris. But in order to make this experiment with any chance of success, he needed information which Marbeuf was unwilling to give, or in other words, some clue.

Two days after the scene in the mayor's office, Subigny finally decided, after a sleepless night, to apply to Dr. Valbrègue for advice and assistance. He determined to relate all the circumstances to him and solicit his aid ; and to secure this it would be necessary to tell him everything without reserve. Intense as was his anxiety to finish with the matter, he realized that it was best not to see the doctor at the hospital, where he would find him surrounded by students ; besides, Dr. Valbrègue, as soon as his morning round was ended, was obliged to hurry off to visit other patients. From two to four o'clock, however, he received people at home, and this was the best time of day that André could select for his interview.

This interview was the more urgent as on rising that morning, André had received a very curt note from M. Vernelle, in which the banker forbade his ever entering his presence again, and in which no allusion whatever was made to Clémence. Madame Subigny, without asking her son for any explanation of his conduct, had taken the first train for Havre. André was consequently at liberty to act according to his judgment, and he began by calling on Marbeuf, whom he found in a very savage mood. He calmed him a little by telling him that Babirole had nothing to reproach herself with ; and he expressed great astonishment on learning that she had again left the Rue Lamartine, declaring that no one would ever hear of her again. This fresh disappearance annoyed André greatly, for he wished to question Babirole further ; but he did not show his annoyance, as he did not care to take Marbeuf entirely into his confidence. He merely asked his friend to be at his disposal after four o'clock, and Marbeuf at once promised not to leave home that day.

The hours seemed interminable to André, who spent them in utter solitude. However, at a quarter to four o'clock, he entered the doctor's reception-room, and found that all but one or two patients had departed. The consultations were nearly over, so he didn't have long to wait. Dr. Valbrègue received him coldly, remarking even before André had seated himself : "I was called to Monsieur Vernelle's yesterday evening to attend his daughter. You will hardly be surprised to learn that she is very ill ; but it might be well for you to understand that one may die of grief and mortification."

"Do not make me still more wretched, sir," replied Subigny. "I came to speak to you on this very subject."

"To me! And why, if you please? I abstain from expressing any opinion on your conduct, and leave the task of criticising it to others."

"But I entreat you not to condemn me without a hearing," Dr. Valbrègue made no reply, but the stern expression of his face did not relax. "The reason I have ventured to apply to you, sir," continued André, "is because you alone can assist me in extricating myself from the terribly embarrassing and humiliating position in which I find myself."

"Excuse me, I am neither your relative nor your friend, and I fail to see—"

"I know that I have no claim upon you, but I attach great value to your esteem, and I think you will grant it me, if you will only consent to listen to me."

"I do not understand you in the least. Still, what have you to say to me?"

André, disconcerted by the doctor's curtness, felt that it would be best for him to speak briefly and to the point, instead of entering into a long explanation. "Do me the favour to read this letter," he said, handing the missive which had caused the scene in the mayor's office.

"You must be losing your senses, sir. I have not the slightest desire to meddle with your affairs, and—"

"This letter was written fifteen years ago by my father to Madame Vernelle. You know that she abandoned her husband and daughter. Read it, pray—"

The doctor still hesitated, but at last he took the letter, and hastily perused it. "Good heavens!" he exclaimed. "You are certain that your father wrote this?"

"I recognise his handwriting."

"What a terrible story. And so Mademoiselle Clémence is really your father's daughter. You did right to act as you did. But why did you wait till the last moment?"

"Because this letter only came into my possession at the mayor's office. Just then the mayor asked me the usual question, and my only resource was to answer 'No' as I did."

"Who brought you this letter?"

"A young girl—the one who recognised Marbeuf at the hospital."

"Well, Mademoiselle Vernelle's misfortune is irreparable, and I don't see of what use I can be to you in the affair."

"But would you not show this letter to Monsieur Vernelle," said André, timidly, "he would then cease reproaching me, and his daughter would approve of the course I took."

"Can you really think of my doing that," replied the doctor. "What! for the sake of your justification you wouldn't hesitate to break Monsieur Vernelle's heart, by robbing him of his last illusion. He adores his daughter, and has brought her up most lovingly. She has consoled him for her mother's misconduct, and he has only her left in the world. He has lost everything—position, wealth; his daughter remains, and you wish to let him know that she is not really his child? Why, it would be better to kill him outright, like that scamp who tried to poison him wished to do."

André hung his head. "What can I do, then?" he muttered.

"You must resign yourself, sir," rejoined the doctor, "resign yourself to your fate, hard as it may be to bear. There are times in life when real courage consists in braving public opinion. People will condemn you;

blame your brutality, and call you heartless. It is hard to bear, but it is better to sacrifice your pride rather than to commit an unworthy act. And if ever Monsieur Vernelle learns the truth, he will do you justice. Maybe he will learn it, as his wife is still alive, I believe. But how can she, knowing the facts, have consented to such a marriage?"

"She didn't know my name—at least she wrote to her husband's notary that she had signed the deed of consent without reading it, as she did not wish to know who was to be her daughter's husband."

"She must have lied."

"I rather believe she is mad."

"Why do you fancy that?"

"I saw her here in Paris. I went to summon her to go abroad, and give her consent to the marriage."

"But in that case she knew that your name was André Subligny."

"I called on her husband's behalf, and did not give my name."

"That was a strange course."

"It was suggested to me, and I now understand why."

"Who suggested it?"

"A man who has betrayed Monsieur Vernelle and hates him. This man knew the facts, and urged me to marry Clémence. He had devised this atrocious revenge for having been slighted as regards his own pretensions to her hand."

"And what is this scoundrel's name?"

"Chantepie—he was Monsieur Vernelle's cashier, and greatly contributed to his ruin."

"Why didn't you denounce him?"

André hesitated for a moment, but he had secretly resolved to confess the whole truth, so he boldly replied: "Because I was in his power. I think it best to tell you all. I have been guilty of a fault which I have certainly fully expiated. On the day I called on Monsieur Vernelle for the first time, I was left alone in his office for a moment. There was a large pile of bank-notes on the table, and I picked up one of the packages, prompted by a foolish curiosity to see how much one hundred thousand francs would weigh. Monsieur Vernelle returned almost instantly, and in my fright I lost my senses completely, and slipped the money into my pocket. Chantepie was watching me through a sliding window at the time and saw me—"

"Commit theft," concluded Dr. Valbrègue, sorrowfully.

"You are not obliged to believe me, of course, but I swear to you that I had no intention of keeping the money."

"Then you should have returned it."

"I had not the courage to confess that I had touched it at the time, for Mademoiselle Vernelle was present, having entered the room with her father. Monsieur Vernelle did not perceive his loss, and I went away, wondering how I could make restitution without any one discovering that I had tampered with the money. Marbeuf was waiting for me in a neighbouring café. I told him of my unfortunate blunder, and he offered to extricate me from my embarrassing position."

"In what way?" inquired the doctor, who was beginning to feel interested in the story.

"Marbeuf proposed that he should return the money that very evening, and tell Monsieur Vernelle that he had picked it up in the court-yard."

"And you trusted the money to him?"

"Yes; but I have since bitterly regretted having adopted his suggestion, for you know what it cost him."

"I know now, but I did not suspect it before, for you never told me a word about this matter."

"I could not tell you without ruining my prospects. Now, having nothing left to hope for, I have nothing to conceal. Marbeuf went off, promising that he would join me again in an hour's time. I was staying with him at his rooms. I waited for him there all night, in vain. I was sure of his integrity, so I thought he had been robbed, and perhaps murdered, in the street. There seemed to be nothing left for me but to blow my brains out, and I was preparing to do so, when Chantepie unexpectedly made his appearance. He came to tell me that, having seen me take the bank-notes, he had paid the missing hundred thousand francs into the safe, out of his own pocket. I could not credit such wonderful generosity on his part. To convince me, however, he told me that he had been very well acquainted with my father, and that in saving me he was only repaying a debt of gratitude he owed him. He added that I could refund the amount at some future time, and he dictated an acknowledgment, which I was foolish enough to sign. I had not the slightest suspicion of his diabolical scheme, and yet, from that very day, he began to talk to me about marrying Mademoiselle Vernelle. A month later he imperiously ordered me to marry her, and he almost threatened to inform on me if I refused to comply with his instructions."

Dr. Valbrègue had listened as intelligent physicians always listen, weighing carefully each word of this narrative, which interested him on more than one account, and without making any interruption. "Very well, I am satisfied in my own mind," he said, after a moment's silence. "It was this man who robbed your friend. His liberality did not cost him much."

"He!" exclaimed Subigny. "I think him fully capable of such a crime, but it is impossible. Marbeuf, who knew him by sight, would have recognised him."

"No, he wouldn't, supposing he was attacked from the rear; besides, even if he did recognise him at the time, you would know nothing about it, as your friend has since forgotten everything. But tell me, since he left the hospital, have you said anything to him about the bank-notes?"

"Yes, sir; and he distinctly remembers that I gave him the money at the restaurant where we dined together; but that is all. He is rather under the impression that he went to Monsieur Vernelle's house, but he is not sure."

"No matter; we have a starting point at last, and we will try to assist his memory. Is he at home now?"

"I saw him this morning, and he promised me that he would not leave home to-day."

"Then I will accompany you to the Rue Lamartine without delay. I was about to visit some patients, but they can wait awhile."

"What! you wish—"

"I wish to make an experiment—one that I should have made some time ago, had I been acquainted with all the circumstances of the case. I am going to make it in the interests of science, and you have even more reason to be anxious for its success than I have. I may not be able to restore you the happiness you have lost, but I hope to be able to deliver you from Monsieur Chantepie's clutches. Come, we still have a couple of hours of daylight left us. Let us turn them to the best possible account."

Five minutes afterwards, the doctor and André were driving towards the Rue Lamartine. They were fortunate enough to meet Marbeuf at the door of his house. He had become weary of waiting for his friend, and was about to visit his favourite café. Dr. Valbrègue alighted, dismissed his carriage, and then said, point blank, to his former patient: "My dear friend, Monsieur Subigny has just told me the story of the missing bank-notes. I don't blame you for concealing it from me, but the time for concealment has past. You must go with me to the spot where you left your friend on the evening of the accident, and we may possibly succeed in solving the mystery."

Marbeuf could not refuse the doctor anything. Dr. Valbrègue had not only sworn to cure him, but had kindly lent him money; and never had a loan been more opportune than those five hundred francs, for André was in no situation to assist his friend. "I will second your efforts to the very best of my ability," replied Marbeuf, eagerly.

"Monsieur Subigny tells me that you have an indistinct recollection of first going to Monsieur Vernelle's house?" remarked the doctor.

"A very indistinct recollection, sir; though I must have gone, for I was anxious to fulfil the commission André had entrusted to me. You do not suspect me of appropriating the money, I hope?"

"No, certainly not. I know that you are an honest man. Still, it is fortunate for you that no one knows the story of the bank-notes. People would hardly fail to accuse you of having kept them. They were not found upon you, it is true, but folks might suspect you of having concealed them somewhere."

"Oh, sir!" muttered Marbeuf, in accents of sincere indignation, "I—"

"It would be absurd, as I know perfectly well. One cannot feign the symptoms I myself verified. Besides, I am almost certain that it was Monsieur Vernelle's cashier who robbed you."

"How could he have known that I had the money in my possession? He wasn't acquainted with me."

"You forget that he was seated at the table near ours at the restaurant, and that he may have seen me give you the package," said André. "I handed you the money when we were finishing dinner, and while he was still there."

"I did not recollect this circumstance, and you have never reminded me of it since I left the hospital."

"Because I thought I was still under obligations to Chantepie. But Dr. Valbrègue has opened my eyes. Chantepie only lent me the money he had stolen from you."

"The rascal! If I were sure of that, I would wring his neck for him."

"First help us to prove that he is the culprit," said the doctor.

They had been walking briskly along as they talked, and had now reached the Rue Lafayette. "There is the restaurant where we dined," said André, "and it was here, on the pavement, that we separated."

"Yes, I recognise the spot," murmured Marbeuf.

"Then, to reach Monsieur Vernelle's house," began Dr. Valbrègue, "you would have had to follow the Faubourg Montmartre as far as the Rue Bergère. There is no other route, unless one takes a very roundabout way."

"And I must have chosen the shortest, for I was in a great hurry, as Subigny was waiting for me."

"Very well, let us take the same route as you did. Don't try to talk,

but observe the houses and shops carefully, and perhaps you will see some object that will put you on the track."

Dr. Valbrègue placed himself between the two friends, and they walked on, without exchanging a word, until they reached the corner of the Rue Bergère. There the doctor paused, and said: "You must have turned into this street. Haven't you noticed any familiar object since we started?"

"No, sir. The faubourg must, of course, present a very different aspect now; for when I started out, after dinner, it was dark."

"What day was it?"

"The 9th of February," replied André. "I recollect the date, because it was that of my arrival in Paris."

"And your friend must have left you at about eight o'clock?"

"At exactly half-past eight, I am sure, because I glanced at the time-piece over the door of the restaurant."

"So it isn't likely that Monsieur Marbeuf was molested in this neighbourhood, where the cafés remain open until two o'clock in the morning. We must proceed further. But in which direction? Monsieur Vernelle's door-keeper can perhaps give us some information on the subject."

They resumed their walk, and Dr. Valbrègue, who had assumed command of the expedition, did not pause again until they reached the banker's residence. "Do you know where you are?" he asked abruptly.

"Yes," replied Marbeuf. "This is certainly Monsieur Vernelle's house. There is the gateway at the corner of the Rue Rougemont, by which one enters when one has business at the bank. I have been there several times. But the offices are closed in the evening, so it isn't likely that I tried to gain admission there—"

"No, but at this gateway in the Rue Bergère, or, in other words, at the private entrance which I myself usually enter by."

Marbeuf made no reply. He was scrutinizing this gateway, and from his anxious countenance it was evident that he was striving to recall his recollections. "I remember now," he exclaimed, suddenly. "I entered here, and spoke to the doorkeeper. He has sandy whiskers."

"That is true," exclaimed both the doctor and André, in the same breath.

"I asked for Monsieur Vernelle, and the doorkeeper replied that he had gone to the theatre with his daughter."

"To what theatre?"

"I can't remember; but I do recollect that I immediately decided to go in search of him there."

"That is something. But there are a great many theatres in Paris, and it is scarcely probable that the doorkeeper will remember the answer he gave you six weeks ago. We must question Monsieur Vernelle on the subject, and in his present frame of mind—"

"I remember," cried André. "Mademoiselle Vernelle told me that her father took her to the 'Renaissance' that evening. She spoke of the operetta they were performing there. I am sure that I am not mistaken."

"And I don't doubt the accuracy of your memory. So we have a clue at last. But, unfortunately, there are several routes from the Rue Bergère to the 'Renaissance.' The question is to learn which one you chose."

"The most direct, undoubtedly."

"By way of the side streets, then, not by way of the boulevards. One question, though, before we go any further. If you had entered the theatre,

you would certainly remember it. The lights, the crowd, and the music could hardly have failed to make an impression on your mind."

"I recollect nothing of the kind."

"But you are sure that you started for the theatre?"

"Yes, I am sure of that."

"Then you must have been assaulted on the way. That seems strange—in the heart of Paris, and before nine o'clock in the evening! Such a thing could not possibly have happened on the boulevards, so we must follow the route leading through the side streets."

"There is only one—that leading along the Rue de l'Échiquier."

"Let us take the Rue de l'Échiquier, then. It is less frequented in the evening than the neighbouring streets, as it is lined with packers' shops, which close at nightfall. Come, gentlemen."

They walked together in the direction of the Faubourg Poissonnière, and when they had passed it, Marbeuf became more thoughtful and observant. On passing the massive portals of the Academy of Music, he paused for an instant, as if struck by some recollection; but after reflecting, decided to proceed on his way. In the Rue de l'Échiquier, the sound of the packers' hammers seemed to arouse him, and after glancing at the shops, he muttered: "It certainly seems to me that I passed this way." Again, a little further on, he said, musingly: "Yes, here is the place where I was obliged to step out into the street because the sidewalk was obstructed by several large cases that some men were taking from a dray."

"Then we are on the right track," remarked the doctor. "In fact, we cannot be far from the end of our journey, for you couldn't have been assaulted in the Faubourg Saint Denis, and we are very near it now. This street is a very short one."

They had not gone twenty steps beyond the corner of the Rue Hauteville, when Marbeuf suddenly paused once more. There was an open trench across the foot pavement, and the doctor at first thought that this was what prevented his patient from advancing. But Marbeuf exclaimed: "It was here."

"What! you fell into that hole?" said Dr. Valbrègue. "You must be mistaken. It is surrounded by boards, and you would have had to throw yourself into it purposely. Besides, that was six weeks ago. The work could not have been begun at that time."

"Who knows?" murmured Subliguy. "Some workmen are not very expeditious. See, there isn't a single one at work here now."

"I am sure of what I say," rejoined Marbeuf. "At the bottom of the trench there is a gas-pipe against which my head must have struck. But at that time there was no hoardings about the opening."

"But it seems strange that you did not see the hole, as there is a street-lamp close by which must have been lighted at the time," remarked the doctor.

"I may have made a mistake."

"Then the bank-notes may have fallen from your pocket, and been picked up by some one."

"That is possible, though I recollect that I pushed the package well into my pocket."

"But you must have been picked out of the hole, and it is hardly likely that any one would have taken the trouble to transport you to the Boulevard des Invalides. It certainly could not have been here that you fell—if fall you did," added the doctor, doubtingly.

He was again beginning to wonder if Marbeuf might not be trying to deceive them. Marbeuf, however, did not seem to have the slightest suspicion of this fact, but stood leaning over the railing, round the opening, measuring the depth of the trench. Several loafers had also paused, probably mistaking the trio for contractors, who had come to investigate the progress of the work. Among these loungers there was one who scrutinised Marbeuf with marked attention. This inquisitive person wore a costume which indicated his calling beyond any possible doubt—his glazed hat and red waistcoat proclaiming him to be a driver in the employ of the Paris Cab Company. Marbeuf, who was gazing down into the trench, did not notice that this man was looking at him; but Valbrègue and André were both surprised at the persistency with which he stared at their companion.

There was no vehicle standing near, so the man must be off duty, and taking advantage of his leisure time to stroll about. Suddenly leaving the group of by-standers, he approached Marbeuf, and remarked, very unceremoniously: "Ah, well! citizen, you seem to be all right again."

"What do you mean? I am not acquainted with you," replied Marbeuf, curtly.

"That doesn't surprise me. You didn't take much notice of anything or anybody the evening I met you. Besides, that was, at least, six weeks ago. But I recognised you instantly—and this trench, too."

Marbeuf did not understand a word of the reply; but Dr. Valbrègue, who was more discerning, scented some valuable information, and so he said to the driver: "Step this way, my friend. I should like to talk to you."

"Certainly, as much as you like. I am not at work to-day, and have nothing to do but take a stroll."

Marbeuf and Subligny followed the pair a short distance out of the hearing of the by-standers, and the doctor, catching hold of the cabman by one of the buttons of his overcoat, then exclaimed: "Now, my good fellow, you must tell us how you became acquainted with this gentleman."

"Willingly; for I certainly did him no harm—quite the contrary. Well, this was how it happened: One evening, in the early part of last month, I was going to the stand in the Rue de Trévis, after taking two ladies to the Porte Saint Martin theatre, when, on passing this trench, my horse took fright and shied. Just as I gave him a cut with the whip, I heard some one shout to me, and saw a man's head appear above the level of the pavement. 'Some fellow has fallen into that hole, and can't get out,' I said to myself; so I drew near the foot-pavement and got down from the box to help the fellow out, for I thought if such an accident had happened to me, I should be very glad of a helping hand. But as it was, the man who had shouted to me wasn't drunk; it was another man who was with him."

"What! another man who was with him?"

"Yes; that gentleman there with you—he was lying at the bottom of the trench. But ask him to tell you the particulars. He was unconscious when we dragged him out, but his friend must have told him all about the affair the next day."

Marbeuf opened his eyes in astonishment. He did not know what to reply, but a light was beginning to dawn upon his mind. Dr. Valbrègue hastily proceeded with the investigation. "Then you helped the gentleman out?" he inquired.

"Yes; and we had no little trouble in doing it; for the gentleman is

rather heavy, and he could not help himself a bit. I thought, at first, that he was dead, and, indeed, it is a wonder that he was not killed by his fall. He must have a tough head !”

“ Well, what followed ? ”

“ Well, his companion remarked to me : ‘ It isn’t surprising. He drank a whole bottle of brandy this evening ; and, of course, he could neither walk nor see straight. I managed to get him along as far as here, after leaving the wine-shop ; but he suddenly let go of my arm, and nearly dragged me down in the trench with him. It would have served him right if I had left him there ; and I should not have succeeded in getting down into the hole to drag him out if the workmen hadn’t left a ladder near by. ’ But he can’t walk. What shall we do with him ? ’ I asked. ‘ We will take him home in your cab, ’ was the answer. ‘ He lives rather far from here ; but I will hire your trap for an hour, and, after I have handed him over to his doorkeeper, you can bring me back here, and I will give you ten francs for your trouble. ’ ”

“ I felt sure that I was taken somewhere in a vehicle, ” muttered Marbeuf.

“ Ten francs are not to be sneezed at, so we hoisted the gentleman into the trap. His friend stepped in after him, first telling me to drive to the corner of the Rue de Babylone and the Boulevard des Invalides. ”

“ At last ! ” muttered the doctor, who, having foreseen this reply, had found it difficult to restrain his impatience.

“ That’s where you hang out, is it not, sir ? ” said the driver to Marbeuf, laughing. “ By jingo ! you were in no condition to get home without help, and your friend certainly rendered you a great service. He took good care, too, that you shouldn’t get into trouble with your wife. When I reached the corner of the boulevard, he made me stop, and said : ‘ Wait for me here, and I will take him home alone. He lives just round the corner. He is a married man, and his wife is perhaps waiting for him at the window. If she saw him brought home in a cab, she might rate him roundly ; but if he is with me, she will say nothing. The doorkeeper will help him up to the third floor, and to-morrow morning I will call and inquire how he is getting along. ’ ”

“ Was there any perceptible change in the gentleman’s condition ? ” inquired the doctor.

“ He seemed a little better ; but his friend almost had to carry him. He was beginning to talk a little, but I couldn’t understand what he said. About ten minutes afterwards the other gentleman returned, and I drove him to a café on the Boulevard Poissonnière. ”

“ Would you recognize this café ? ”

“ Certainly I should, as readily as I should recognize the gentleman himself. When I once see a man, I never forget his phiz. Didn’t you notice that I recognized this gentleman here as soon as I saw him ? Besides, I don’t fall in with such customers every day—one who comes out of a sewer, and another who pays like a millionaire ! ”

“ Then you recollect the other gentleman’s face, I suppose ? What kind of a man was he ? ”

“ He was a tall man with a full beard, and about forty years old, I should say ; in short, a very gentlemanly-looking person. However, when he came up out of the hole, he was wearing a blouse. He explained the fact by saying that he always wore one when he went on a spree. He left it in my cab—made me a present of it, indeed. Then I saw that he was

dressed in a full suit of black, like a notary. But this gentleman here must know him ; so I don't understand why you ask me all these questions."

"Here are twenty francs, my friend," said the doctor. "Now, show me the café you drove to."

"Certainly !" exclaimed the driver, pocketing the gold coin delightedly.

"I shall earn my money very easily, for the place is not far from here."

"Ah, well ! do me the favour to walk on in advance ; I won't lose sight of you."

The cabman needed no urging, and when he was some distance ahead, Dr. Valbrègue turned to his companions, and said : "Do you doubt the accuracy of my diagnosis now ? I declared, from the first, that the accident was a fall ; that the wounded man had partially regained consciousness, and been able to talk, and even walk, but had afterwards relapsed into the condition in which he was situated when brought to the hospital. We now know what took place. The man who robbed you left you on the Boulevard des Invalides, and it is a miracle that you did not freeze to death, as he hoped you would. He must have pushed you into that trench."

"I recollect now that I was followed by a man in a blouse ; and it seems to me that he jostled me as he passed."

"He must have gone down into the trench, searched your pockets, and taken the bank-notes and your papers from you."

"I wonder why he did not leave me there ?"

"Because he wished to mislead anyone who tried to investigate the matter. He saw that you were not dead ; but he didn't expect you to recover, and if your body was found a long way from your home, it would be taken straight to the Morgue. Then, even if it were identified, no one would suspect that you had died of injuries inflicted by falling into a trench in the Rue de l'Echiquier. All this, to my mind, proves most conclusively that Monsieur Vernelle's cashier was the thief. He saw you receive the money at the restaurant, and knew perfectly well where Monsieur Subligny had obtained it ; so he made his plans accordingly, and lost no time in carrying them into execution. Monsieur Subligny will explain to you what his plan was, if you do not already know. It is necessary now to secure one last bit of proof. If the cashier is in the habit of frequenting the café where this driver is taking us, we shall soon be absolutely certain ; and when we are satisfied on the point, leave all the rest to me."

André and Marbeuf exchanged glances. They were too deeply agitated to speak. Their guide had ascended the Rue d'Hauteville, and turned to the right, on to the Boulevard Bonne-Nouvelle. On reaching the Faubourg Poissonnière, he paused, instead of crossing it ; and an instant later he hastily concealed himself behind a newspaper kiosk. The trio in the rear, surprised at this manœuvre, quickened their steps to overtake him, and the doctor asked him why he was concealing himself. "Because I now guess who you are," replied the coachman.

"And who are we, pray ?"

"Detectives, of course ; and I don't want my fare of the other night to know that it was I who denounced him. He is over there, and if he saw me in company with you—"

"Where is he ?"

"Sitting there in front of that café. There are two of them—a dark and a light-complexioned man. The dark fellow is the one."

"It is indeed Chantepie !" muttered Subligny.

"And I know his companion," said the doctor. "I am satisfied now

that Monsieur Chantepie is a would-be murderer as well as a thief. Gentlemen, you must allow me to manage the affair."

"What, sir! do you mean to talk to this man?" asked André.

"I don't merely mean to talk to him, but to make him confess the whole of his villainy," replied the doctor. "You give me *carte blanche*, I suppose?"

"Certainly, but—"

"Make no objections. We have no time to lose, and I might never find so good an opportunity again. Do you see a small café there on the other side of the boulevard, directly opposite the one where the cashier is sitting?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, do me the favour to seat yourself at one of the tables there, in company with your friend and this worthy cabman, who, I am sure, won't decline some refreshment."

"That's true!" exclaimed the cabman, "for I am terribly thirsty."

"You are not to lose sight of me, mind," resumed Dr. Valbrègue, "while I am talking with monsieur—monsieur—what's his name? You told me just now, but I have forgotten."

"Jules Chantepie."

"Very good. Now, when you see me take off my hat, all three of you are to cross the street and join me. But tell me, Monsieur Subligny, can this Chantepie produce any other proofs against you than your receipt?"

"He entered unexpectedly, just as I was writing to Marbeuf, and he took possession of my partially completed letter. In this letter I alluded to the bank-notes taken from Monsieur Vernelle's office. He also appropriated the revolver with which I had intended to shoot myself."

"How did he know that Mademoiselle Clémence was really your father's daughter?"

"He was Madame Vernelle's confidant and still advises her."

"Ah! And no doubt she is anxious to become a widow. Well, one word more. Are you acquainted with the individual who is drinking some absinthe with the cashier?"

"No, but I saw them talking together one day not far from Monsieur Vernelle's house."

"Naturally. They must be very intimate. He is the messenger of the chemist who makes up Monsieur Vernelle's medicines. I questioned him, myself, in his employer's presence. You know that I made an investigation after the discovery of the attempted poisoning. It was futile, but we shall arrive at the result by a different route. All roads lead to Rome, you know. I presume you thoroughly understand my instructions, gentlemen, so you had better go."

This conversation had taken place behind the newspaper kiosk, and Chantepie had not perceived the party. Subligny, Marbeuf, and the cabman, crossed the boulevard, in compliance with the orders of the doctor, who walked slowly towards the café where M. Vernelle's cashier and his companion were enjoying a friendly glass together.

Dr. Valbrègue had seen Chantepie several times at the banker's house, but he had never spoken to him; and he flattered himself that Chantepie would not recognize him, at least not at the first glance. Assuming the indifferent air of a promenadeur who is merely strolling about to kill time, he sauntered towards the café, but, unfortunately, the weather being cold and foggy, pedestrians and customers were rare, and Chantepie and his companion were almost alone outside the establishment. The tables on

either side of them were unoccupied, and they had probably chosen this place so that no one might overhear their conversation. They must also have been on the watch, for the chemist's messenger suddenly perceived the doctor. As he no doubt did not care to obtain a nearer view of him, he whispered a few words to his companion, and then rose up and walked off hastily in the direction of the Boulevard Montmartre. Chantepie did not move, but he began to light a cigar. This is one of the easiest ways to conceal one's face, and he probably hoped that Dr. Valbrègue would pass by without noticing him. But the doctor walked straight up to him, dropped unceremoniously on to a chair beside him, and said, point-blank : "Good-day, sir. You are Monsieur Vernelle's cashier, I believe?"

"I was, but I have resigned my situation now that my employer is going out of business. Haven't I the honour of speaking to Dr. Valbrègue?"

"The same, sir. But it is not with you that I have business. I wished to speak to that young man who walked off on seeing me. He is a friend of yours, I think?"

"No, sir. I know him slightly, but that is all."

"I also know him. He is in the employ of a chemist who does not show sufficient care in making up my prescriptions. He narrowly escaped poisoning Monsieur Vernelle, quite recently, thereby placing you in a very embarrassing position."

"Me!" exclaimed Chantepie.

"Yes, you! The bromide my patient took passed through the hands of the man who was just now drinking with you—and through yours as well."

"That is false. I should like to know what fool gave you this information."

"I have not the slightest objection to telling you that it was Monsieur Vernelle's secretary."

"Subligny! I suspected as much. It is a wonder that he does not accuse me of putting the poison into the bromide."

"He does formally accuse you of it."

"He! This is really too much. A rascal I saved from the assizes!"

"What, sir? Why, I took him for an honourable man."

"He is a thief, and I have proofs of it in my pocket. So he dares to slander me! Ah, well! his assurance shall cost him dear."

"Excuse me, sir. The situation is a very grave one. I had my reasons for believing what Monsieur Subligny said; but if you can prove to me that he himself has been guilty of a crime, I shall no longer attach the slightest importance to his statements. Will you, therefore, have the kindness to specify the nature of his crime?"

Chantepie hesitated for an instant. The doctor's questions might conceal some trap. But it was necessary to end the discussion then and there, and Chantepie was satisfied that no one could contradict what he was about to say. "Upon my word! this scoundrel who is trying so hard to injure me, deserves no further consideration at my hands!" he exclaimed. "His vile history is as follows: On the day he first presented himself at my employer's establishment, with a letter of recommendation, he was left alone for a few moments in M. Vernelle's private office. There were eight hundred thousand francs in bank-notes lying upon the table. He picked up a package that contained one hundred thousand francs and slipped it into his pocket. There is a small window between my office and M. Vernelle's room. It was partly open at the time, and I saw Subligny commit the theft. I might have gone in and collared him, but I had com-

passion on him, and allowed him to go away unmolested. I knew where he lived, and early the next morning I went to see him. I found him writing a letter in which he confessed the theft, and announced his intention of committing suicide. A pistol lay beside him, on the table. I thought he was overwhelmed with remorse. His apparent misery touched me, and I offered to refund out of my own pocket, the money which he had stolen. Ah! he needed no urging to induce him to accept my offer. An hour afterwards I placed in the safe one hundred thousand francs that I shall never see again, for he has no fortune, and he has lost his situation."

"It was certainly an act of generosity that does you honour."

"You see how it has been rewarded, however."

"And it was the more noble on your part, as you are not rich, I believe."

"I had, by untiring industry, amassed a modest competence, but nearly all my savings have gone in the way I mentioned."

"You were very imprudent, for you only knew M. Subligny from having seen him commit a theft."

"I allowed myself to be carried too far by my natural kindness of heart, I admit, but at that time I did not really expect to lose my money. Subligny is a very handsome fellow. He had taken a desperate fancy to Vernelle's daughter, and I thought he would marry her some day. But Vernelle is now a ruined man; besides, the match—which was regarded as a settled thing—was broken off at the very last moment—in the mayor's office in fact. However, Subligny shall pay dearly for the slanderous reports he is circulating about me. I shall not get my money back, as he hasn't a penny; but I have the means of exposing him in my possession, and I shall not hesitate to make use of them."

"Do you know why the match was broken off?" inquired the doctor, after a short silence.

"I suppose Subligny did not care for the girl without a dowry, and the dowry having vanished with Vernelle's fortune, Subligny backed out of the engagement."

"I think it was from some other cause. But to return to this noble act of yours. I really cannot admire it sufficiently. Still, I fail to understand why you should have been compelled to make the amount good. Subligny certainly had not had time to spend it between evening and morning. Why did you not then and there compel him to make restitution?"

"He pretended that he had intrusted the money to a friend who had volunteered to return it to M. Vernelle in the course of the evening. That friend has never been seen or heard of since, and I am satisfied that the two scoundrels had conspired together to retain possession of the stolen money."

"This friend's name was Marbeuf, was it not?"

"Yes, you are right. His name was Marbeuf. Subligny was staying with him at the time."

"Then you are fully satisfied of his complicity?"

"Not fully, as no one knows what has become of him."

"You are very much mistaken. I know. He was under my charge in my ward at the Necker Hospital, for more than a month. He had met with a severe fall, and had lost his memory entirely, but I have cured him, and he now distinctly recollects all that happened to him."

Chantepie turned pale, and beckoned to the waiter, drawing out his purse as he did so. It was quite evident that he did not wish to hear any more. "Will you go with me to see him?" inquired the doctor, rising up and raising his hat.

It was the signal agreed upon with André.

"Why should I?" stammered Chantepie. "I don't know the gentleman, nor am I at all anxious to make his acquaintance; besides, I am really obliged to leave you now—to my great regret, I assure you." He had risen to his feet, and thrown a coin on the table.

"I can understand your anxiety to go," said Dr. Valbrègue, ironically, "but I insist upon introducing you to Monsieur Marbeuf. You won't be detained long, for here he comes."

Chantepie glanced in the direction indicated, and saw Subigny, Marbeuf, and the cabman crossing the street; then, instantly realising that he was lost, he suddenly turned as if about to run off, but Dr. Valbrègue caught him firmly by the arm, and said imperiously: "If you try to make your escape, I will call a policeman. You may attempt to deny your guilt, but there will be three of us against you, and it will go hard with you if you compel us to take you before a commissary of police. Take my advice, and don't stir. It is the only chance you have left of escaping the penalty of the law, for I hope we shall succeed in adjusting the matter satisfactorily to all parties. I am not at all anxious to send you to prison."

Chantepie was too much overcome with surprise to reply, and the three witnesses having come up, the doctor proceeded with his examination. Turning first of all to the cabman he inquired: "Is this the gentleman you drove from the Rue de l'Echiquier to the corner of the Rue de Babylone and the Boulevard des Invalides, one evening in February?"

"I can't say the contrary," growled the driver, who seemed but little pleased to serve as the auxiliary of people whom he mistook for detectives. "Especially as I still have the blouse the gentleman left in my vehicle," he added.

"Very well, my friend. Where do you live?"

"At La Villette. Here is my number," replied the man, presenting one of the printed cards with which the Cab Company supplies each of its drivers.

"That will do, my man. We shall have no further need of you, I think. You may go now."

The driver lost no time in availing himself of the permission.

"Now, Monsieur Marbeuf," continued the doctor, putting the driver's card carefully away in his pocket-book, "will you kindly relate your nocturnal adventures to Monsieur Chantepie?"

Surrounded by opponents so fully armed at all points, Chantepie thought less of defending himself than of concluding the compromise to which Dr. Valbrègue had alluded. Marbeuf, on the contrary, could only, with the greatest difficulty, repress his desire to seize his enemy by the throat. "What is the use of relating them to him?" he exclaimed, angrily: "he is far better acquainted with them than I am, for he not only robbed, but tried to murder me."

"Prove this to a magistrate if you can," replied Chantepie, shrugging his shoulders, for he was now beginning to regain some of his wonted assurance.

"I will undertake to prove it if you wish me to do so," retorted the doctor. "Monsieur Marbeuf recognizes you, and you recognize him. We will now let that account stand for the present, and pass on to another that concerns Monsieur Subigny only." Marbeuf took the hint, and drew a few steps aside. "And now," continued Dr. Valbrègue, with an amount of composure that a veteran magistrate might have envied, "the moment has

come to confess that you made this pretended loan merely to get Monsieur Subligny completely in your power, and so to further the diabolical scheme of revenge which you had long been plotting."

"You forget that I only did all I could to further his own wishes," sneered Chantepie. "But whether I was actuated by the motives you impute to me or not is a matter of very little consequence, I fancy. The question is, What are you aiming at?"

"You must surrender to me the receipt which Monsieur Subligny signed, and the letter you took from him."

"Never! I will not surrender the only weapons I have to defend myself with. I assure you if you go too far I shall not hesitate to make use of them."

"Take care. I still have three powders of bromide and strychnine at my house; and the chemist who prepared them will help me to prove that they passed through your hands. A word from me would send you before the assizes; and I can find witnesses who will explain at whose instigation you tried to get Monsieur Vernelle out of the way. He was in his wife's way you know. How much did she pay you for this attempted murder?"

Chantepie hung his head. He realised that the doctor knew all, and he gave up all hope in his secret heart, though he still made a show of resistance. "I don't care particularly about retaining Monsieur Subligny's receipt," he muttered; "it is absolutely worthless; but I don't clearly understand what I should gain by handing it to you."

"You will secure permission to go and get hanged elsewhere."

"What do you mean by this insolence?"

"I mean that we will not prevent you from leaving Paris, or even France, and that we shall enter no complaint against you. I might accuse you of an attempt to poison your employer; and Monsieur Marbeuf might accuse you of theft and an attempt to murder him; but we will be silent."

"What guarantee shall I have that you won't denounce me?"

"My word, and that must suffice."

"Your word; yes, but the word of these gentlemen does not inspire me with any confidence whatever."

"Content yourself with mine, then. I will be responsible for them. Quick, now, hand me the papers."

"I will send them to you this evening. I haven't them with me now."

"You have a very short memory. A few moments ago, when I first accosted you, you declared that Monsieur Subligny was a thief. You knew perfectly well that the charge was false, and to convince me, you added that you had written proofs of the fact upon your person. These proofs are, of course, the receipt and the letter you appropriated. Had I asked to see them then, you would have shown them to me. Denial is useless. Comply with my request immediately. I have no time to waste. If you refuse, one of these gentlemen will escort you home and keep you a prisoner there while I pay a visit to the public prosecutor. In my capacity as a professor of the faculty and a hospital physician, my testimony will have some weight in such a matter; and there is little doubt but what you will be in prison before to-night."

Chantepie was foaming with rage; but he had not completely lost his senses, and he felt that it would be much better to yield than to incur any risk of arrest. His desire to wreak vengeance on Subligny did not equal his anxiety to escape the probable consequences of a criminal trial. Besides, what good would it do him to ruin Subligny's reputation now that his scheme had failed? It was Vernelle and his daughter that Chantepie

wished to injure, and they were in no way connected with this matter now, as the marriage had been broken off; neither did it cost him much to return a receipt for money which he had not disbursed, for, thanks to his connection with the treacherous Bertaud, he was now rich. "I shall not quarrel with an influential man like yourself about such a trifle," he said, carelessly. "Here is the receipt, and the letter too. The revolver is at my house. I will return it to its owner to-morrow."

Dr. Valbrègue took the proffered papers, and silently handed them to Subigny, who hastily glanced over them, and then tore them into fragments, which he scattered to the winds.

"You can now relieve us of your presence," remarked the doctor, turning to M. Vernelle's former cashier. "I shall pay no further attention to you unless you take it into your head to trouble my friends again. In that case, I shall consider myself released from my promise; and I did not deceive you when I told you that I had the bromide powders, besides, you know that I have the cabman's number."

Chantepie pulled his hat down over his eyes, and turning upon his heels walked away. Marbeuf, who had remained a short distance off during the conversation, now approached, exclaiming: "What! you had him in your power, and yet you let him go?"

"What do we want of the scoundrel now that we have made it impossible for him to injure your friend?" responded Dr. Valbrègue. "Forget him. You are cured; Monsieur Subigny has regained possession of documents which might have compromised him. What more can you ask?"

"Nothing, sir," replied André, in a voice full of emotion—"nothing, except to thank you from the bottom of my heart. You have saved us both—Marbeuf from madness, and me from dishonour."

"It is my business to save people," replied the doctor, gaily, "and I don't confine my attention exclusively to the sick. I have remedies for diseased minds as well; and as I am not in the habit of deserting my patients as soon as I have set them on their feet again, I have been interesting myself in your behalf, my dear Number Nineteen; in fact, I have secured you a position with a merchant who will give you a salary of six thousand francs a year to begin with."

Marbeuf, amazed by this good news, could hardly find words in which to express his gratitude.

"As for you, sir," continued Dr. Valbrègue, turning to Subigny, "on the occasion when you came to the hospital to recognise your friend and told me that you meant to marry Mademoiselle Clémence, despite her father's ruin, it occurred to me to do something to improve your prospects. I had long known the Vernelles, and I did not like that Mademoiselle Clémence's husband should be reduced to want. The situation has changed, still there is no reason why I should modify my earlier intentions. This is what I had found for you—and what is still at your disposal—a situation at Havre. You will be in your native town and near your mother. The position I speak of is in the house of a shipping merchant, and it is a lucrative one. He knows you by hearsay; and I assured him of my willingness to be responsible for you. He promises you a prosperous future—and he has no daughter," added the worthy doctor, smiling. André's face clouded at this allusion, and Dr. Valbrègue, noticing the fact, exclaimed: "Don't take offence. You have no real cause to reproach yourself. Monsieur Vernelle's affairs are being satisfactorily adjusted—I have

received this information from a reliable source—and he will have enough left to take him to some foreign land, and enable him to begin life anew there; he is extremely anxious to do so on account of the scandal caused by his wife's recent return to Paris. His daughter, I am sure, will eventually find a husband worthy of her. So take heart, and bless the hand that saved you from a violent death. What has become of your fair preserver?"

"And mine as well," murmured Marbeuf. "But for her I should still be in the hospital."

"She has disappeared," replied Subigny, sadly.

"You really ought to make every possible effort to find her," replied Dr. Valbrègue. "Call and see me to-morrow, both of you, and bring me news of her. It was the same young person, I believe, who warned Vernelle of the attempt to poison him. She richly deserves your gratitude; there is no question about that; and providing she is a good and virtuous girl, why, if I were in your place, I think that I should acquit myself of my obligations by marrying her." With this rather startling conclusion, the doctor took leave of the two friends, without waiting for André's reply.

XII.

THE apartments M. Vernelle had secured for his secretary in the Rue Rougemont were charming, but they had not brought happiness to their occupant, by any means. Still, André's misfortunes really dated from the night spent in Marbeuf's modest lodgings. After his change of quarters, fortune had even seemed to smile upon him for a while; but this was only the transient brightening of a clouded sky—one of those brief calms that precede and presage a tempest. A thunder-bolt had suddenly fallen, blighting several lives; and of the victims, André was certainly neither the most innocent nor the most deserving of pity. He had a culpable act upon his conscience; but thanks to Dr. Valbrègue's energetic intervention, he now no longer had any reason to dread the consequences of a rash deed which might have cost him his honour. M. Vernelle, who had, of his own accord, embarked upon the dangerous ocean of speculation, had only himself to blame for his ruin, for had he abstained from gambling at the Bourse, a treacherous subordinate could not have impoverished him. And he was not above reproach as a father; for he had done all in his power to bring about the marriage between Clémence and André whom he scarcely knew. Clémence alone was guiltless, and yet her life was broken. What fate awaited her? Exile with M. Vernelle, who might not live many years longer, and then utter loneliness might follow. André would have been glad to restore her past happiness, but he was powerless; and pending his departure for Havre, he spent most of his time shut up alone in his rooms, brooding over his misfortunes. What could have become of Babiole, he wondered, and what had befallen her prior to the trying scene at the mayor's office?

André only knew what Marbeuf had told him, and Marbeuf knew but little. Babiole had declared that Subigny would never hear of her again, and she had again deserted her modest rooms, almost immediately after the scene at the wedding. André could not forget the services she had rendered him, and that she had saved M. Vernelle, as well as Marbeuf. As he thought of all this devotion, other facts occurred to him. He recollected

certain looks and gestures which had passed unheeded at the time, or rather whose meaning he had obstinately refused to understand. But now he could no longer close his eyes to their significance. He was obliged to admit that Babiole had certainly loved him ; and he sometimes asked himself if he had acted wisely in disdaining this faithful love, and if this truly charming girl would not be a much better helpmate for him, in his present humble condition, than any of the fashionable young ladies with whom he had associated in former years, or with whom he might still associate ? They had no doubt never strayed from the path of virtue, but was not this due rather to the fact that they had never been exposed to the temptations that assail poor work-girls, than to any merit of their own ? The question now was to ascertain if Babiole had, indeed, yielded to temptation, as seemed only too probable, from the circumstances of her first disappearance, when she had left the house with Madame Divet, only to return there for a few hours after her melodramatic re-appearance at the wedding. She alone was in a position to prove the contrary, and no one had any idea where she was.

Marbeuf, who still resided in the Rue Lamartine, could furnish no information about her. More eager than André, who seemed to be in no haste to leave for Havre, Marbeuf had entered upon his new duties, and now devoted his whole time to his employer. André only saw him in the evening. He had learned, from his friend, that there was no danger of M. Vernelle's becoming a bankrupt ; but that he would, on the contrary, still possess a small sum, as there had been a considerable advance in prices before the end of March, so that the settlement proved much less disastrous than had been apprehended. Marbeuf also told André that he had heard that Bertaud had retired from business with an ample fortune, and that his accomplice, Chantepie, was about to leave Paris for Rouen, his native town—to take charge of a commercial agency, in which he hoped to turn his peculiar talents to good account. But Marbeuf was altogether ignorant of Babiole's whereabouts, and did not feel much anxiety on the subject, as he had no suspicions of André's interest in her.

The two friends were utterly unlike in temperament, André being excitable and enthusiastic, Marbeuf, matter-of-fact and prosaic. André, who was well aware of his friend's lack of sentiment, was almost afraid to question him, much less to admit that Madame Divet's pretty employee was beginning to hold a very enviable place in his esteem and affection. Several days passed, and enforced inaction began to have a very depressing effect upon André's spirits. His departure for Havre could not be much longer delayed if he wished to profit by M. Valbrègue's recommendation, so he began to make the necessary preparations. He had sent M. Vernelle a letter in which, without making any attempt to excuse his conduct at the wedding, which had been occasioned he said by an imperative necessity, he stated that he was obliged to leave Paris, and requested the banker to dispose as he pleased of the furniture of the apartment in the Rue Rougemont ; and he was now only waiting for a reply to this letter to leave the city in which he had suffered so much. He waited two days, but waited in vain. Then coming to the conclusion that M. Vernelle had decided to hold no further communication with him, he resolved to pack his trunk and depart. He decided upon his train, and invited Marbeuf to a farewell dinner, being anxious to spend his last evening in Paris with his friend. The latter was to call for him at half past six, but it was scarcely five o'clock when André heard a ring at the bell. Marbeuf alone was in the habit of calling,

and at that hour he must still be at his office. So André thought that his visitor might be M. Vernelle, and hastened to open the door, his heart beating fast at the mere idea of an interview with his benefactor. It was not the banker, however, but a tall, distinguished-looking man whom Subigny did not at first recognize. "Are you Monsieur André Subigny?" inquired the stranger rather haughtily.

"Yes, sir. To whom have I the honour of speaking?"

"I am Prince Lipetsk. Though you may not know me, you must at least know my name."

André started back in surprise. It was, indeed, the Russian nobleman whom he had seen in company with the Baroness d'Orbec at the Opéra Comique, and afterwards at her house in the Rue Galilée. What could the prince desire? wondered André. "I recognise you now," he replied, "but I can not imagine to what I am indebted for your visit."

"I called to request an interview which may prove a rather lengthy one, but when you have heard what I have to say, you will not regret having granted my request."

"Come in, sir," said André; and he thereupon ushered the prince into the little parlour where most of his time had been spent since the catastrophe, offered him a chair, took a seat opposite him, and exclaimed: "Speak, sir, I am listening."

"Will you permit me to first light a cigarette?" asked the Russian, drawing an elegant case from his pocket.

"Suit yourself, sir," replied André, who, fancying that the prince suspected him of having saved Babiole from his clutches, half expected a challenge; "I have consented to receive you," he added, "though it is not customary for two combatants to make arrangements in person for such an affair as that which brings you here."

"Do you suppose that I have come here to challenge you!" exclaimed the prince, bursting into a hearty laugh.

"If it is not that which has brought you here, what can it be?"

"A number of matters that affect you deeply. I have no grievance against you, but you probably think that you have one against me, and I am anxious to undeceive you. I am also anxious that you should not suspect a person who possesses my highest esteem, and who certainly has a right to yours, of conduct which has always been far from her thoughts."

"Explain yourself more clearly, if you wish me to understand you."

"With the greatest pleasure. I will begin by saying that I know who you are, and all that has happened by my own fault. I sinned, however, chiefly through ignorance, and had I known that the gratification of a mere caprice would have—"

"The facts—confine yourself to them, if you please," interrupted André, impatiently.

"I am coming to them; and to prove that I am thoroughly well-informed, allow me to say that I am perfectly aware that you were concealed behind a curtain on the evening I called at a certain house in the Rue Galilée—that you overheard the whole of my conversation with the baroness, and that you there saw the young girl whose beauty made such a deep impression upon me. It was Yolande's maid who apprised me of these facts, after the departure of her mistress. She could not tell me your name, as she was ignorant of it, but I will presently explain how I discovered it. I will not speak of my connection with the so-called Baroness d'Orbec—that connection ceased as soon as I learned that her husband was living, and that

she had abandoned her daughter. I shall never see her again, and if I have consented to settle an annuity upon her, it is only because she can hardly be considered accountable for her actions, and because, left to her own resources, she might sink to the lowest depths of degradation and shame."

André listened, in silence, to these painful explanations, and he certainly deserved some credit for not interrupting them, for he was suffering terribly. "I will now return to the subject of the young girl before referred to," resumed the prince, with imperturbable calmness. "You have a very poor opinion of me; and I don't wonder at it. But to judge me justly, you must know something of the life I have led from my earliest boyhood. I was still but a child, when my father left me in possession of an immense fortune, and I have never known any law save my own fancy. In Paris, where I have often sojourned, I have only had to express a wish to have it instantly gratified. An humble work-girl has convinced me, however, that some things cannot be bought in your country." André started, but he did not open his lips. "Yes, sir," continued the Russian, "nothing could tempt this girl to do wrong, and the test was complete. My confession also shall be complete, for I impose it upon myself as a sort of penance for the unworthy part I played in this affair. That very same evening, Yolande sent her milliner to see me. The woman proved to be an unscrupulous creature, who was ready and willing to do almost anything for the sake of a little money, and the following day she enticed the poor girl to her house, drugged some beverage which she gave her, and with the assistance of my majordomo, whom I have since dismissed, had her taken to my house near the Parc Monceau."

"And you dare to confess this!" exclaimed Subigny, savagely. "These wretches acted in obedience to your orders, and you deserve—"

"I give you my word of honour that I knew nothing whatever about the shameful means they intended to employ. The woman assured me that no coercion whatever would be necessary. But listen to the conclusion of my story. On the following day I learned what had really occurred, and I treated the wretches as they deserved."

"But you profited by their crime," said André, bitterly.

"To my shame I admit that I tried to profit by it, but my overtures were rejected with scorn and horror. This poor girl refused a fortune that would have tempted a princess, and ordered me to restore her to liberty."

"And you refused!"

"No, sir. I told her that every door was open, and that she could leave whenever she chose."

"You insinuate, then, that it was of her own free will that she spent a fortnight in the house into which you had lured her."

"She remained because she was utterly unable to leave it. The shock she had sustained, and the powerful opiate which had been administered to her, brought on brain fever in its most violent form. I spent those two weeks in a state of indescribable anxiety and alarm, I assure you. The sick girl was attended by a skilful physician, and a faithful maid-servant, and fortunately youth finally triumphed over her malady. She slowly recovered from her severe illness, and almost the first use she made of her returning strength was to leave the house. She had no difficulty in doing this, however, for I had not the slightest desire to detain her against her will."

André understood the facts at last, and his eyes filled with tears. Babiole, barely convalescent, had risked her life to save him.

"You know why she was so anxious to escape?" resumed the prince, after a brief pause. "I also know it, and admire her courageous devotion."

"What do you mean?" asked André stupefied.

"Well, I subsequently questioned that Madame Divet, wishing to learn what had become of the girl. She pretended she didn't know, but when I questioned her respecting some strange parts of the affair, she told me all about the baroness and—your father. She had his letters."

"Yes," interrupted Subigny, "I was told that. What can she have done with them? She might show them to the first comer."

"She swears that she has now burnt them. Perhaps, however, she may have returned them to the baroness, who, so I learned from the Monaco notary, signed the deed of consent to that abominable marriage without reading your name. But let that pass. After all these strange events I wanted to do something for the brave girl whom I had so greatly wronged. I thought I might offer her an indemnity—but she refused it."

"Then you have seen her again?" cried Subigny.

"Yes! I had a deal of trouble in discovering her whereabouts, but I finally ascertained her address. I called on her at her own home, or rather at the home of her uncle, who was present at our interview, and there I saw a sight I shall never forget as long as I live: the uncle, a poor devil of a collecting clerk, hesitating between a very natural desire to see his niece comfortably provided for, and a fear that the money might be regarded as the price of dishonour, and the niece proudly refusing a gift which was but a poor reward for her courage and virtue. All my efforts to overcome her objections proved unavailing, however, and I was obliged to take my money away with me. But in spite of my failure I had the satisfaction of completely reassuring the uncle, who, I think, was troubled by some suspicions that his niece's conduct had not been quite irreproachable; however, I am now obliged to believe in the existence of incorruptible virtue, and I must admit that that upsets all my previous theories."

André felt touched by the prince's language. "I am glad to have seen you, sir," he said, "and if I in my turn might ask you a favour, it would be to give me the uncle's address?"

"Certainly. I have it with me," replied the prince, opening his notebook. "Here it is: Auguste Brochard, No. 22 Rue Saint Fiacre. If you wish to find him at home, don't go until after five o'clock, as he runs about all day. But perhaps you only care to see his niece?" added the prince, with a meaning smile.

"I wish to see both of them," said André.

"Is it really true, then, that you haven't seen this charming girl since she saved you from one of the greatest misfortunes that could possibly befall a man? You certainly owe her a visit of thanks. I did my duty in coming here for the express purpose of testifying to her innocence. It is now your turn to do yours."

"I shall not fail in that, I assure you."

"I believe you, sir, and now I have only to bid you adieu, for it is not likely we shall ever meet again. I leave for Moscow on the day after tomorrow. Allow me to add that I regret having made your acquaintance at so late a day, and that I shall always hold you in the kindest remembrance." As the prince spoke he offered André his hand, and then walked towards the door. André accompanied him as far as the landing, where he met the doorkeeper bringing him a letter.

This was certainly a day of surprises, for the address was in M. Vernelle's

handwriting. André quite forgot the foreigner in his eagerness to peruse this missive, and it was with deep emotion that he tore open the envelope, and read: "My friend." These were certainly the words with which the letter began, although André could scarcely believe his eyes. "My friend, I know everything, and must ask you to forgive me for having so misjudged you. When I wrote to you, immediately after the terrible scene in the mayor's office, I could see no possible excuse for your conduct. Now, I not only freely forgive you, but thank you; for the wretched woman who has disgraced me has written to me confessing the sad truth. She swears that she knew it too late to prevent the scandal, but she now freely confesses, impelled by remorse, and I have no reason to doubt her words, the more especially, as by her direction, I have questioned a woman who was formerly her confidant and accomplice. This woman, a milliner, named Divet, has shown me proofs, and explained to me the part played in the affair by that young girl who had already saved my life. I cursed her, and now I bless her. I hesitated about revealing the terrible truth to Clémence, and yet after reflection, I preferred that she should know her mother's conduct, rather than believe that you had acted treacherously. Need I add that we love one another as much as formerly, or that with the assistance of devoted friends, I have succeeded in settling my affairs satisfactorily, and in saving from the wreck enough to begin life anew in a foreign land. Before you receive this letter I shall have left Paris with Clémence. I shall sail from Liverpool for New York, where I have business acquaintances who will help me in getting upon my feet again. We shall never forget you, and the day will perhaps come when we shall meet again, for time will assuage our present sorrow. Farewell, my dear André, think of us sometimes. We shall both pray for your happiness and success in life; and I have heartily thanked Dr. Valbrègue, who has found a new situation for you, and has so kindly interested himself in your future. I leave, however, with a deep regret that I am unable to reward the brave girl who saved my life and yours; I commend her to your care, feeling sure that you will not desert her."

André was moved to tears by the perusal of this letter. His father's conduct humiliated him. As a merchant, M. Charles Subigny had been a model of integrity, and yet, it had been proved that he had sadly disregarded moral honesty. André, his son, wept with very grief, and the tears that dimmed his sight at first prevented him from seeing a line traced at the bottom of the page, a single line penned by a trembling hand. It ran as follows: "I forgive you. Be happy. Marry her." Clémence had not signed these words, but she had certainly written them.

André forgot his father's misconduct in thinking of the two young girls who had occupied such a prominent place in his life, and who had both suffered so deeply through him. He compared their lots in life, and was compelled to admit that Babiole was after all the more unfortunate of the two. Hope remained to Mademoiselle Vernelle. Her reputation had not suffered. She might yet love again and be loved in return. But Babiole, over whom a cloud of suspicion still hung, and who was obliged to toil for her daily bread, with no protector save an uncle, who had doubted her virtue, what had she to hope for? She had been living contentedly in her humble sphere, when out of pure kindness of heart she had involved herself in these complicated affairs which had finally placed her at a libertine's mercy. She had sacrificed herself for others, and the very persons she had saved had been the first to turn against her. Even the man she loved had secretly

suspected her, and her hasty desertion of the house where she had met him for the first time proved most conclusively that she cherished no hope of ever seeing him again. But justice had been done her at last, for Dr. Valbrègue, M. Vernelle, and Clémence, seemed to have united in urging André to atone for the wrong he had done her. The prince, too, had given him similar advice while rendering a glowing tribute to Babiole's virtues. Remembering all this, André hesitated no longer. Marbeuf would soon call for him, no doubt, but he did not care to consult his friend, who was somewhat prejudiced against Babiole, and who would undoubtedly attempt to dissuade him from his purpose. To reach the Rue Saint Fiacre from the Rue Rougemont, one only has to cross the boulevard, and in a few minutes André had reached the house which the prince had designated.

"Does Monsieur Brochard live here?" he inquired.

"On the fifth floor—the first door to the left."

After this brief conversation with the doorkeeper, André flew upstairs, three steps at a time, so that when he reached the floor mentioned it was not emotion alone that quickened the throbbings of his heart. He paused for a moment to take breath, and then rang.

It was Babiole who opened the door—Babiole in a simple home dress, and looking more beautiful than ever in a snowy apron and woollen *fichu*. She turned pale on seeing Subigny, but tried her best to receive him as a stranger, although her eyes contradicted her manner. André had no difficulty in reading forgiveness in them. "What do you wish, and who told you that I resided here?" she asked, with affected coldness.

"Prince Lipetsk," replied Subigny, promptly. "He has just left me, having called for the express purpose of telling me all about your mysterious disappearance. I know now, that you are a saint and a martyr."

"I am neither the one nor the other, sir. I haven't the slightest pretensions to sanctity, and as for martyrdom, I have suffered a good deal, it is true, but I find myself very comfortable now."

This was said almost gaily, and Babiole, as she spoke, opened the door a little wider, so that André managed to enter the ante-room. "I warn you that I am at my uncle's," she said, "and that he may return at any moment."

"That is exactly what I desire. I hope you will allow me to wait for him. I have a favour to ask of him."

"You had better not. He is not very kindly disposed towards you."

"I shall be content if he doesn't refuse me a hearing."

"Then you merely came to have a talk with my uncle," said Babiole, smilingly. "Be content, sir, he is coming upstairs. I recognise his step."

André listened and heard the stairs creak under a heavy tread.

The abode in which Babiole had taken refuge consisted of four rooms much smaller than those of the lodging in the Rue Lamartine, but quite as neatly kept. There was no carpet, but the tiled floor was beautifully clean, and two rather gaudy lithographs, representing the taking of the Smala, and the charge of the cuirassiers at Reichshoffen, adorned the walls. Uncle Auguste had served in the cavalry, and his rooms showed it. André, who had only seen him once in the hospital, scarcely knew him when he entered the rooms, but the collector recognised Subigny at a glance, and indulged in an energetic oath by way of expressing the surprise he experienced at finding him with Babiole. "What are you doing here?" he asked, almost savagely. "And you, Babiole, why did you admit this gentleman?"

"Because he told me that he wished to speak with you," promptly replied Babiole, who wanted to compel André to disclose the object of his visit. "Me!" exclaimed the uncle. "Nonsense! it is you he came to see, and it seems to me that I arrived just in time to prevent him from telling you a parcel of falsehoods."

"You are mistaken, sir," replied André, endeavouring to remain calm. "I spoke the truth. It is really you that I have to deal with, as you are the uncle of Mademoiselle Elizabeth Babois, I believe."

"Her uncle and guardian. Well, what of it?"

"Then it is to you I must apply, in order to obtain her hand."

Babiole turned as white as a sheet, but Uncle Auguste flushed with anger, and exclaimed: "Her hand! Do you mean that you ask for my niece in marriage?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ah, so you want to make merry at our expense! Understand, once for all, that this is a subject upon which I won't tolerate any jesting."

"You certainly cannot suspect me of jesting at this—one of the most solemn moments of my life."

"You are really going too far! Do you think you will make me believe that your intentions are honourable—that you, a gentleman, would marry my niece, who is only a poor work girl! And after all that has passed—Well, you have plenty of audacity, I must say."

"I see, sir, that you don't know why my marriage with Mademoiselle Vernelle was broken off, at the last moment."

"On the contrary, I know perfectly well all about it. My niece has told me everything."

At this point a happy thought struck André. Drawing M. Vernelle's letter from his pocket, he handed it to the uncle, saying: "Will you have the kindness to read this?"

The uncle took the note, rather reluctantly, and began by glancing at the signature. "It is from your employer," he growled. "I have no desire to know anything about your affairs with him."

"Pray read it. There is an allusion to mademoiselle in the letter."

Babiole started and looked anxiously at André. She could not imagine what M. Vernelle could have had to say about her. Her uncle decided to read the letter, however, and when his perusal was over, he said rather more affably: "Monsieur Vernelle is a very worthy man. I always thought so, and now I know it, so I am pleased to learn that he does my niece justice. But this doesn't explain the desire to marry her which has so suddenly seized hold of you. If it is merely to please your former employer, my niece doesn't want a husband who would marry her out of obedience sake."

"I love her," replied André, looking straight at Babiole, whose eyes drooped.

"Wait a bit, here is a line at the bottom, written in a different hand," remarked the uncle.

"That of Mademoiselle Clémence Vernelle."

"And she, also, advises you to marry my niece. They both seem to favour the match."

"Because they know that the marriage would insure my happiness, but if the idea is distasteful to Mademoiselle Babois—"

"Oh, no," said Babiole, naively.

"What! so you must needs have a finger in the pie!" exclaimed Uncle

Auguste. "Why, you sly puss, it was only yesterday that you announced your firm determination to become an old maid."

"Because I had no idea that Monsieur Subligny was thinking of me."

"Then if *he* didn't marry you, you would not marry at all?"

"No, uncle."

"But I hope you don't intend to marry him without my consent."

"No, uncle, for I am very sure that you will grant it."

"That depends. In the first place, I fear you would make a great mistake in marrying this gentleman. You are only a poor work girl, and he has been brought up differently."

"My grandfather was a sailor," interposed André, quickly. "My father made a fortune, after beginning life as an office-boy in the house of a shipping-merchant, but he died ruined."

"Then you haven't a penny, and you have just lost your situation, as old Vernelle has gone to the dogs! My niece is no better off, and I have nothing whatever to leave her at my death. What will you live upon?"

"Upon our earnings," replied Babiole, cheerfully.

"You think so, do you?"

"I have, at least, managed to earn a very comfortable living, so far, uncle."

"Because you have only had yourself to look out for."

"My husband will be able to provide for himself."

"A lucrative position has just been offered me," interposed André.

"Where, in Paris?"

"No, in Havre. I am indebted for it to Dr. Valbrègue, and I should have entered upon my new duties before now, but for my anxiety to see Mademoiselle Babois before my departure."

"Valbrègue, the physician at the Necker Hospital?"

"Yes, sir, and he also favours this marriage. He appreciates your niece's worth, and knows how deeply we are all indebted to her."

"I know what she did for you, but how about the others?"

"Didn't she discover my unfortunate friend at the hospital?"

"Oh, yes, Number Nineteen. What has become of that fellow?"

"He has obtained an excellent situation in a mercantile house, thanks to the doctor."

"So he had no crime upon his conscience, after all?"

"He is the most honest man of my acquaintance. A scoundrel robbed him, after trying to kill him—a scoundrel named Chantepie."

"The villain who reduced my brother-in-law to poverty years ago?"

"The same, sir; Mademoiselle Babiole told me so on the day I saw her for the first time, and warned me against him. I wish that I had listened to her advice."

"He has been arrested, I hope?"

"No, for Dr. Valbrègue, after extorting from him a full confession of his guilt, promised not to denounce him."

"Valbrègue was too generous."

"He dreaded the scandal that might ensue. Besides, Chantepie has left Paris for good."

"He had better not return, for if I ever chanced to meet him, he would have a very uncomfortable time of it, I assure you. But we are wasting time in talking of this scoundrel. You really seem anxious to marry my niece, and I judge from appearances that she's willing to become your wife; but perhaps you are not aware of the contemptible trick that old hussy Madame Divet played on her?"

"I know everything, sir. I have seen the prince, and he paid a most eloquent tribute to Mademoiselle Babiole's virtue. He came to see me for the express purpose of confessing the whole truth."

"And he came here to offer my niece an indemnity."

"Which she refused?"

"Of course. It wouldn't have looked right—although Babiole hasn't anything to reproach herself with."

Babiole had listened to this conversation without speaking by word of mouth; but her eyes were sufficiently expressive, and in them André read the artless joy she made no attempt to conceal.

Babiole was no coquette, so she feigned neither embarrassment nor astonishment, as a fashionable young lady would have done; and now she ventured to express her feelings with a frankness which some of her superiors in rank might have considered most unseemly. "Monsieur André," she said, unblushingly, "I believe that you love me, and I myself have loved you for a long time. I believe, indeed, that I have loved you ever since the first day I met you, and I should be ready to marry you now if it wasn't too soon to talk of such a thing. The municipal offices in the Rue Drouot would bring me bad luck."

"Mademoiselle Vernelle left this morning for America," said André, with all the eagerness of a lover who has forgotten the past in the happiness of the present.

"And if it's a question of the mayor's office," growled Uncle Auguste, "why, we are not in the Rue Drouot district here. Our office is in the Rue de la Banque."

"Then I consent," cried Babiole, laughing. "You ask my hand in marriage, Monsieur André, as if I were a noble young lady, instead of saying bluntly: 'When shall the wedding be?' Ah, well, here's my hand."

André knelt to kiss the slender white hand extended to him; its fingers still bore the marks of the needle, but it was an honest, helpful hand, worth far more than that of many a fine lady. Meanwhile, Uncle Auguste wept for joy.

They are married. Eight months of quiet happiness have effaced the remembrance of past misfortunes. Babiole lives at Havre with her husband. André's mother fairly worships her new daughter; and Uncle Auguste is employed in the same establishment as his nephew by marriage, who will become a member of the firm at no very distant day. Chantepie has been obliged to fly to England on account of some new act of rascality, and Madame Divet has had a severe paralytic stroke. Bertaud recently died of indigestion, after supping with some worthless creature; and the so-called Baroness d'Orbec is on the verge of ruin. However, Dr. Valbrègue has a splendid practice; M. Vernelle is prospering at New York, and his daughter will no doubt marry to her liking. The reward of the righteous comes, sometimes, in this world as well as in the next.

THE MAN WITH THE WAXEN HANDS.

I.

"Yes, decidedly!" said the Marquis, looking courageously at the mocking circle that surrounded him. There were there two young men, bald and decorated, several sceptical old men, a member of the Institute, who passes for the grandson of Voltaire, some incredulous dowagers, and some young women who were too fond of balls to believe in anything else, without counting the witty Countess de Rigny and the charming Mademoiselle Louise de Rigny, her daughter. "Yes," said the Marquis, "I believe in magnetism, sorcerers, necromancers, magic, spiritism, chiromancy, phrenology, vampirism, the evil eye, in everything which is supernatural, astonishing, inexplicable, improbable, impossible, and I believe in it firmly, frankly, and blindly. Saint Thomas is not my ancestor, thank God, and if I have declared war, implacable war, against any enemy, it is against doubt. In truth, I am so credulous, that I find the reasoning of man who maintained that Adam had existed, because he had his portrait in his cabinet, perfectly logical."

The Marquis Ange-Gontran de Rouvre was thirty-five years of age. He might pass, without question, for a handsome man, in spite of his red hair and a slight obliquity of vision, which seemed sometimes to direct his eyes towards the contemplation of the infinite. Gontran had a pale complexion, fine features, a woman's hands and feet, a slender waist, a fine name and a princely fortune. He enjoyed at the same time the reputation of being witty and eccentric. All these qualities were blended together, so as to form a veritable hero of romance. Bear in mind that Gontran had been twice round the world for his own amusement, and that his reputation of traveller added still further to his personal advantages. One thing only spoilt all this: the Marquis, whose father had died in a dramatic manner, killed in a duel as some said, by suicide according to other accounts, had long and strange fits of melancholy. His blue eye then became of a profound green colour, and fixed itself upon an invisible point, lost in space. Gontran remained thus absorbed for hours together. You might have compared him to a Hindoo fakir, anchylosed in the contemplation of his navel. But this defect was known to his friends alone, and Gontran was renowned in society as one of the most brilliant, most witty and most charming of men.

After his profession of faith, the Marquis looked around him as if to seek a champion—an adverse champion. He found none, and continued:

"Superstition is my element. I was born on a Friday, on the thirteenth of March. It is a fatality ; every artless belief finds its echo in me, and that which consoles me is, that after successive observations I have come to the conclusion that the strong minds are really the weak ones. I firmly believe that there are unlucky days and lucky days, and I mark them gladly as people marked them of old at Rome, and as people now mark them at Madagascar. For all the gold in the world I would not put a shoe or stocking on my right foot first, and I never laugh on Friday for fear of weeping on Sunday."

At that moment one of the two bald young men, M. Arthur de Langeterre, leaned towards Mademoiselle Louise de Rigny, and said in her ear :

"Your Fridays will not be particularly gay when you become Marquise de Rouvre."

Louise shook her head and smiled in sign of doubt, which meant to say that there is many a slip between the cup and the lip, and that, although the betrothed of M. de Rouvre, she was not yet his wife.

"At any rate," interrupted the member of the Institute, "you do not believe in vampires ; science only sees pathological cases where you see miracles. It would be easy for me—"

"To convince me ?" said the Marquis. "No, without presumption, not at all. I am tenacious in my opinions. You speak of vampires ? You deny that vampires exist ? I have seen some ?"

"Nonsense."

"I have seen some too," said M. Arthur de Langeterre, smiling gracefully ; "I have seen some at the Ambigu in a piece by Antony Béraud, or some one else. It was an English clown, who was got up in a terrific and fantastic fashion. I can see him still with his white face, enveloped in a blood-stained shroud. Pray, did your vampire in any way resemble that one, Marquis ?"

"Not at all," said Gontran. "My vampire was dressed as you and I are ; he spoke French as you write it, sir (the member of the Institute bowed), and he was really a charming man. But why should I not tell you the whole story ?"

There was a profound silence, and the Marquis, after having passed his hand over his pale brow, proceeded with his narrative, to which a slight trembling in his voice lent a great charm—the charm of dread :

"I was travelling on the banks of the Danube, two years ago. I was by myself. A companion is sometimes embarrassing : for adventure it is better to be alone. Whenever I could leave my guide at the hotel, I did so willingly, and went off on foot, without any other companion than my thoughts, for days together. I used to sketch, observe, write, think. The Morlaque language was tolerably familiar to me ; I liked to talk with the peasants whom I met. These good people do not look upon a stranger as an enemy ; I knew, too, always how to secure a welcome ; I always carried with me a gourd full of good liquor and some amulets against witchcraft. I made presents of my amulets and liquor, and in exchange I would ask to have some story told me, and I never had to press for this.

It was thus I had been received, with open heart, by Viecz Baglanovich, a rich farmer, loyal, jovial, and a free drinker, who used to sing songs, moistened by frequent libations, and who would say to me, pointing to his daughter Helen :

"She is the pearl and rose of Presteg. It is because she has a fresh face

and blooming health that I can say to you with a gay heart : ' My little father, here is a pleasant journey to you ! ' ”

Helen was indeed pretty, but as I am neither a painter nor a novelist, I shall not attempt to paint her portrait. I remained two or three days with Viecz Baglanovich. At the end of that time the rain was falling.

“ We shall have it wet for a long time, now,” said my host, “ and you cannot resume your journey during such weather.”

The country was, in fact, nothing but a vast marsh ; the flooded river spread its yellow waters like a muddy lake ; and in the plain, furrowed with streams that grew larger each day, the trees stretched their meagre branches sadly against a low, damp, and gray sky. I thanked Baglanovich, and told him that I would remain until the return of the sunbeams.

“ May the sunbeams never return then,” said my host, gaily, “ and may this infernal weather continue for long months.”

That very evening, as we were at table, there came a sharp knock at the door. Who could it be ? who could be scouring the roads at such an hour in such weather ? Everybody in the village was shut up in his house ; you could hear the wind wailing, and the willows waving their dishevelled branches. Baglanovich rose and opened the door, and there entered a man dressed in the French fashion, wrapped up in a large black mantle, which was all wet and dripping over his travelling boots.

“ Will you not grant me hospitality ? ” he said, in a metallic voice which made me shudder. “ I will pay for it loyally.”

“ Come in,” said Viecz Baglanovich, “ drink, eat, and rest yourself. Sleep under my roof as if you were under your own ; you are at home. But, by Saint-Hyacinthe,” he added, “ a man must be the devil himself to put foot out of doors in such a deluge.”

The stranger approached the fire and held his feet and hands to the flame. He was pale, with long black hair, an aquiline nose, a sharp profile, thin lips ; but what struck me most in him were his hands—long, thin, delicate, almost always motionless, and white and transparent as wax.

He said nothing. I went up to him and asked if he was French.

“ Yes,” he replied.

He added some commonplace details about his life, but I learnt nothing in particular. It seemed as if he wished to hide something from me, and it would have been unbecoming to insist. I left him to his reverie, but as I looked at him I felt a kind of instinctive dread. I turned round and saw Helen with her eyes dilated and fixed upon the stranger. At that moment Baglanovich rose.

“ You must need rest,” he said to his new guest. “ Come ! ”

The stranger rose, saluted me politely, and fixing his glance upon Helen left the room. I saw that she grew pale ; she went and huddled herself up in a corner and I heard her weeping.

The stranger remained ten days in the house of Viecz Baglanovich, and from day to day Helen became paler and paler, and seemed to be slowly wasting away, while her hands resembled the bloodless hands of the stranger. In short, one morning she was found dead in her bed.

Wild with grief, the father threw himself into my arms, wishing he were dead and cursing heaven in the same breath.

“ No ! no ! ” I said to him, “ Viecz Baglanovich, do not die. Before you go to join Helen, think that you have to avenge her.”

"Avenge her!" he exclaimed with the roar of a lion.

"Do you not see," I continued, "that she has been killed by a vampire?"

The old Morlaque bounded like a jackal and sprang to his arms, which were hanging up over the chimney. "Yes," he said "the stranger! the stranger!" And he rushed to the chamber of the man with the waxen hands.

The stranger was not to be found. Viecz Baglanovich ran all over the village crying out for the murderer of his child. A beggar-man, a player on the guzla, had seen the stranger on that very morning hieing away towards Vorgracz. Viecz Baglanovich saddled his horse. He arrived at Vorgracz the same evening. The stranger had just left the village. They showed Viecz Baglanovich the road that he had taken. Viecz Baglanovich caught him up between Vorgracz and Kasno. He seized him by the throat and plunged his poinard into his neck. The next day Viecz was at Prestag, and was present at the funeral of his daughter. In the evening we were sitting alone before the empty hearth. The wind was whistling outside and the rain falling.

Suddenly there was a knock at the door. It was I who opened it this time, and I drew back terrified. Upon my honour we then saw the man with the waxen hands enter, pale, stiff as a corpse, with a gaping wound in his throat, but a smile on his lips, a calm and mocking smile. He said nothing but went straight up to Viecz Baglanovich, who watched him with a wild look, while he showed him his fresh wound, after which he went out. Then Baglanovich uttered a cry of rage and rushed after him, but he saw nothing in the profound darkness.

"To-morrow," he said, as he came in, "I will go along the Kasno road and demand the body. I had forgotten that; I will drive a stake through its heart. The vampire then will not return."

"But," interrupted Madame de Rigny, "your story is horrifying, Marquis, and I really do not know whether I ought to allow you to continue it. Have pity on our sleep." On the other hand, the blonde and sentimental Mademoiselle de Rigny anxiously urged the continuation of the story.

"I have finished," said the Marquis. "The body of the stranger had been found on the road by some shepherds and carried to a neighbouring farm. It was thither that Viecz Baglanovich was taken.

"It is the body of a vampire!" said the father. "He has killed my daughter."

He took a stake, sharpened like a lance, and plunged it into the breast of the corpse. The vampire then opened his eyes; a flood of blood spurted from his mouth, and Baglanovich turned towards the kneeling shepherd:

"My children, this one is smitten with impotence. God wishes us to pray for the hangman and for his victim. Pray for Helen and pray for him."

II.

Just when Gontran de Rouvre was finishing his story by adding that Viecz Baglanovich died of grief, the door of the salon was opened and the servant announced M. Victor de Bermont. A tall young man was seen to enter, pale, and dressed all in black, and as Mademoiselle de Rigny went

forward to greet the new comer, Gontran uttered a cry and became as pale as a corpse. M. de Bermont looked at him with astonishment, and then saluted him politely.

At this moment dinner was announced. Gontran hastened to Madame de Rigny and inquired in a trembling voice, "Do you know that man?"

"Yes. I am his godmother."

"Ah! I must be crazy!" said Gontran. "Do you know whom I thought I recognised in him?"

"No."

"Who?" asked Louise, advancing.

"The man with the waxen hands!" replied the Marquis.

The company passed into the dining-room, where a most magnificent dinner was served. M. Victor de Bermont had taken Madame de Rigny's arm. At table he sat directly opposite M. de Rouvre and Louise. Gontran could not keep his eyes off M. de Bermont.

"How is it," he asked Louise, "that I have never before seen M. de Bermont at your mother's house?"

"He was in Germany when you were presented to us; he has only arrived in Paris within the last few days."

Gontran did not say another word. There was but little conversation at the commencement of the repast. M. de Bermont seemed to be absorbed in some silent contemplation, and Gontran kept watching him with singular earnestness. In truth the former had something strange about him. Thin and pale, his face was framed with long black wavy hair, his straight nose curled over a thin mouth, devoid of moustaches. A sort of nervous tic contracted his white face from time to time, and his sharp, pearly teeth convulsively bit his under lip on which there was generally a drop of blood.

"It is he! it is he!" thought M. de Rouvre, as he kept examining him, and his eyes rested on M. de Bermont's hands. They were white, delicate and graceful as the hands of a woman. Gontran thought that he was dreaming. M. de Bermont had not only an astonishing resemblance to the vampire of Prestag; but this decisive peculiarity of dead hands. Assuredly the vampire and he were one, consequently M. de Bermont must be the stranger whom Viecz Baglanovich had killed. There could be no doubt about it.

Madame de Rigny was talking to M. de Bermont. Gontran felt himself start as he heard the metallic ring of his voice. He shuddered and fixed his eyes suddenly dilated with a sort of ecstatic expression of hate on M. de Bermont. He felt himself seized by a sudden fit of wrath, and only controlled himself by a violent effort. After passing his hand across his brow several times as if to drive away some thought, he took part in the conversation which had now become general.

The talk at that moment turned upon travels, adventures; upon the Chinese and then upon the Aztecs. M. de Rouvre seized the opportunity to allude to the Danube so as to embarrass M. de Bermont, the vampire of Prestag. After having spoken of the marshes and willows of the country, the guzla players, the shepherds and so forth, he turned towards M. de Bermont and asked him somewhat abruptly:

"But if I am not mistaken I have had the pleasure of meeting you in those parts?"

M. de Bermont smiled and replied that the Marquis was mistaken, that his travels had been bounded by the Alps and the Pyrenees; that he had been along the banks of the Rhine, and that once he had passed through

London, though so hurriedly that he had not time to see the Crown jewels at the Tower.

Gontran could hardly restrain himself. The self-possession of M. de Bermont was too much for him. He did not doubt for a moment but that he was the man whom he had already met. Everything proved it, and, above all, the white, corpse-like hands. He soon remarked that M. de Bermont's glance became fixed upon Mademoiselle de Rigny, who seemed to be fascinated by it, and never removed her eyes from the pale face of the young man, whom Gontran observed to smile with an air of wicked triumph. The Marquis felt himself seized with a veritable vertigo. It seemed to him that he was no longer in the Countess's house, but in some fantastic world. This nightmare of a waking man became soon so unbearable and so terrible that he rose, left the dining-room and threw himself into the first arm-chair that he found, closing his eyes and burying his face in his hands. It appeared to him as if his brain were in a turmoil.

"Oh ! that man," he said, "I hate him ! But who is he ? The godson of Madame de Rigny ? They never spoke to me about him before— Ah ! No ! a thousand times no ; he is the murderer of Helen ; Viecz Baglanovich would certainly recognise him !"

And he thought that M. de Bermont had looked at Mademoiselle de Rigny as he had formerly looked at Helen. This thought made the blood mount to his heart, and he returned to the dining-room.

At this moment, by a singular contrast, the face of M. de Bermont appeared to him singularly peaceful and prepossessing. The pale young man was absorbed in the dissection of the wing of a partridge, and did not so much as deign to look at his enemy ; and Mademoiselle de Rigny never removed her eyes from the young man. The Marquis noticed this, and his wrath returned. He further noticed that M. de Bermont affected to refuse certain dishes which were reputed excellent, while he devoured meats with blood in them, and ate enormously. This appetite, which was, by the way, quite natural, seemed to Gontran a savage voracity. A man with such white hands, who looked at Louise so fixedly, and eat so greedily could be nothing but a vampire.

M. de Rouvre returned to his home thoroughly persuaded that providence, in placing him face to face with the vampire of Prestag, had assigned him an important rôle : that of delivering the De Rigny family from such a monster. How could he succeed in his task ? He would reflect, but he would certainly soon act, and would show himself perfectly implacable.

Gontran passed a very agitated night. All the superstitions of his youth, all the ghost stories that he had read in his early years, all his unwholesome studies in alchemy, necromancy, and magnetism combined to procure him the most dreadful visions and the most horrible dreams. In the morning he was worn out and haggard. He rose almost with pain and hurried off to the Countess, and told her frankly and clearly what he thought of M. de Bermont.

"Nonsense !" said Madame de Rigny, "you are joking, Marquis. Besides, I see through your game, you are jealous."

"I, jealous ?"

"Yes, of M. de Bermont. You know that he has asked Louise's hand, and you find it an easy way to get rid of a rival to treat him as a vampire."

She was laughing. Gontran became pale, and said to her, in an agitated voice :

"I beseech you, madame, forbid M. de Bermont your house. Whether it be superstition or folly, I nevertheless feel that that man brings misfortune with him. He is not the stranger of Prestag—I will admit that; but he is the evil-eye, the jettatore of Paris. It is not he who killed Helen, but it is he who will kill Louise!"

"Indeed, Marquis," said the Countess, becoming pale in turn, "think what you are saying. Such a supposition is absurd, it is a calumny, M. de Rouvre—"

"Say that it's cowardice!" cried the Marquis. "But I love Louise. Is she not already engaged to me? Oh! I will save her, and save her, perhaps, in spite of you! As for M. de Bermont, if necessary, I will kill him!"

"All this proves that you are really mad," said the Countess. "What warlike mood is this that has come over you? Do you not know," she added, laughingly, "that vampires cannot be killed?"

"Yes, they can," replied the Marquis, coldly; "if you tear out their hearts, burn them, and scatter the dust to the four winds."

The Countess shuddered, drew back involuntarily, and looked with terror at this man, dressed in the latest and most elegant fashion, who played with his stick and talked of killing a man, simply because he suspected him of vampirism. This fanatic in patent leather boots was really terrible; his wild eye, his clenched teeth, his purple lips, would have alarmed a less courageous woman than Madame de Rigny. The latter briefly related her knowledge of Victor de Bermont. He was the most affable and gentlemanly man in the world, a little cold, enthusiastic enough to love, and selfish enough to be loved, witty without aiming at wit, and the possessor of a fortune which his economical habits, however, made sufficient. He lived in retirement; he was an enemy of society, but not of men; capable of the greatest devotion, but incapable of the slightest caprice.

Gontran withdrew, unconvinced. He saw only one thing in all this, namely, that the Countess thought of giving her daughter to M. de Bermont. This enraged him more than ever. That very evening he learnt that M. de Bermont lived in the Rue Rodier, as the door-porter said, a strangely furnished suite of rooms; that he came home regularly at midnight and never went out before noon: and, finally, that he had a German servant named Gerder. All these circumstances seemed exceedingly romantic to the Marquis de Rouvre. In the first place, what a strange idea it was to go and live in the Rue Rodier. The district is almost deserted, and the street narrow. One must be terribly in love with solitude to live in such a place. Then that regularity of conduct, those fixed habits, that life of discipline, was not all this proof that M. de Bermont was concealing some terrible secret? From that moment Gontran's brain was like a furnace. He conceived a thousand wild projects; he had, like a celebrated publicist, at least one idea a day for getting rid of the man whose presence annoyed him. He first of all thought of provoking him to a duel, but that was too vulgar a way of killing a vampire.

The Marquis's visits to the Hotel de Rigny became rarer. He remarked that the Countess received him with a sort of coldness. When he spoke of marriage one day, Madame de Rigny made an evasive answer. He insisted, and asked her to fix a date. Madame de Rigny replied that Louise was very unwell.

"Of course she is!" said the Marquis, his eyes flashing fire. "It is that wretch! it is he!"

"Of whom are you speaking?" asked the Countess.

"I will kill him," said M. de Rouvre, without replying, and he left Madame de Rigny entirely convinced of his madness.

Gontran returned to his home in a high state of excitement. Instinctively he glanced at a trophy of arms that adorned the wall of his apartment. Suddenly he seized a little Spanish poniard, detached it from the wall, and examined it carefully. The poniard came from Toledo, and belonged to the sixteenth century. On the hilt, in the form of a cross, was the cipher of the Virgin Mary, and on the blade an unknown artist had engraved a pious inscription :

Por rey, por patria,
Por Jesus, por Maria.

"This weapon is blessed!" said Gontran. "I will strike the blow with it!"

The next day he rang at Victor's door. The servant opened it, he was alone.

"How much money must I give you to let me in here to-morrow, after midnight?" Gontran demanded of him.

The man looked at the Marquis with an astonished air. Gontran repeated his question.

"But who are you?" Gerder asked.

"I am the Marquis de Rouvre. I am neither a rogue, nor a thief. All I want is to cut off a lock of your master's hair while he is asleep. It is a bet that I have made; do you understand?"

"Oh! if it is a bet!" said Gerder, holding out his hand in which the Marquis placed several gold pieces.

M. de Rouvre returned the same night. Gerder came and opened the door softly. "Is it you, mein herr?" he asked. He felt a few more louis slip into his hand. "Ah! it is you then. Come this way," he added. And he conducted Gontran across a vast room into an alcove lighted by a night-lamp. "There he is!" he said, pointing to his sleeping master.

M. de Bermont was pallid, and slept with his eyes half open. His white hands were suspended from the ceiling by loops of velvet, and his hair was enclosed in a red-coloured cap. The lamp shed a sinister light over his thin face.

"Well!" said Gerder, as he saw Gontran look fixedly at the sleeper.

"Cut off the hair, quickly!"

Gontran felt a cold sweat over his whole body; his hair stood on end, he shuddered, drew back, advanced, drew back again.

"Make haste!" said Gerder. "If he were to awaken—!"

"He will not awaken," replied Gontran.

Gerder saw the Marquis lean over M. de Bermont; he heard a terrible cry, and the Marquis, pale and agitated, rose up and gained the door walking backwards.

M. de Bermont was still in his bed, pale and inanimate. Only his eyes were open, and the light shone on the hilt of the poniard that had transfixed his heart. Gerder thought it prudent to inform the police of what had taken place. The commissary hastened to the house.

"My master," said the German, "was a man of regular habits, who lived scrupulously and gauged his appetite and his wants strictly. He used to sleep with his arms suspended above him, in order to have white hands. He had no enemies; I do not know why that man murdered him."

The Marquis de Rouvre was arrested just at the moment when he was about to blow out his own brains. The Marquis was not even tried. In accordance with the reports of the doctors, he was taken to the asylum of Dr. B., where he now is. He is the calmest and gentlest of the inmates of that establishment. His frenzy has calmed down ; he thinks now that he is the husband of the fairy Urgell, and he passes his time rhyming ballads in her honour.

Mademoiselle de Rigny has consoled herself by marrying M. de Langeterre, one of those bald young men who had listened to the story told by Gontran de Rouvre with benevolent but incredulous smiles.

THE END.

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